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"IT'S OUR TWO MIDSHIPMEN, DECATUR AND LAWRENCE, AS I LIVE!" EXCLAIMED DARE.

The Three Lieutenants;

OR,

Gentleman George on Deck.

BY T. J. FLANAGAN,

AUTHOR OF "CRUISE OF THE OCEAN QUEEN,"
"MIDSHIPMAN DARE," "THE TWO
MIDSHIPMEN," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THEY MET.

"Poor short lived things! what plans we lay!
Ah! why forsake our native home,
To distant climes to speed away,
For self sticks close, where'er we roam."
COWPER.

"All hands unmoor! Unmoor!"
Hark to the hoarse, but welcome sound
Startling the seaman's sweetest slumbers,
The groaning capstan's laboring,
The cheerful fife's enlivening numbers;
And ling'ring idlers join the brawl,
And merry ship-boys swell the call,
'All hands unmoor! Unmoor!'"

A BLISTERING, broiling hot day in the month of August, 1801—one of those days referring to which you do not characterize it as merely warm—such was the day set for the departure of the U. S. frigate *Enterprise* from the Port of New York to join the Mediterranean Squadron.

The frigate was lying off the Battery, boats were going to and from her (as officers, men and stores were put aboard), and, notwithstanding the intense heat, there was a large gathering to see the vessel sail.

Coming across the Bowling Green toward the Battery were three midshipmen—one slightly in advance of the others, and unobserved by them.

This lad (he was about fifteen), was accompanied by an old gentleman, rather rustic in appearance, and therefore, to the loungers, an object of criticism and ridicule.

"Be careful, George, for I may not be here when you return," the old gentleman was saying as they neared a knot of idlers.

"Never fear for me, uncle; thanks to you, I'm fully able to take care of myself, and—"

At that moment they were passing the before-mentioned knot of idlers, one of whom interrupted the youth by stepping forward and making an insulting inquiry as to how long the old gentleman had been out of the Ark.

The laugh which greeted this was checked instantly by the sudden shooting out of the youth's left arm, followed by the fall of the fellow who had addressed the old gentleman.

The strength and dexterity displayed by one of such delicate and youthful appearance astonished the loafers so much that, until their leader regained his feet and rushed at the youth, they remained quiet.

"Come on! Tear the buttons off him!" yelled the leader, and, thus invoked, several rushed to his assistance.

The youth and the old gentleman were quickly overpowered by their assailants, and were being roughly handled, when the attention of one of the other midshipmen was attracted.

"Hello! Let's see what's going on, Steve!" he exclaimed, and both hurried forward.

The sudden appearance of the two midshipmen caused the loafers to fall back for a moment, thus allowing him addressed as "Steve" a glimpse of the uniform of the youth struggling with his burly antagonist.

"By Jove, Laurie, it's one of our boys!" exclaimed Steve, jumping at the nearest of the gang, while his companion promptly followed his example.

Although but boys, the attack of the newcomers was unexpectedly and surprisingly fierce; and, moreover, they were liable, even likely, to receive aid at any moment, which the loafers well knew, and were correspondingly disheartened.

Nor were the ruffians mistaken, for two or three minutes after the appearance of "Steve" and "Laurie," a third came on the scene, striking right and left, and a man went down every time his fist shot out.

The last comer was a very tall man, several inches over six feet in height, thin and wiry-looking, dressed in the garb of a seaman, and with a decidedly nasal twang.

"Blast ye—ye sharks!" he cried, as the last of the gang took to his heels across the Green. "Attack our officers, will ye? Are ye hurt, sir?"

The last question was addressed to the old gentleman, as he was assisted to arise.

"I thank you, sir, but I am uninjured," replied the other, adding:

"I see you are a seaman, and I hope my nephew will have the good fortune to have you near him."

Steve and Laurie had in the mean time helped the third midshipman to his feet. His clothes were torn and dirty; there were bruises all over him, and an ugly cut in one cheek, but he took matters very coolly.

"Thank you," he said to the midshipman, when his uncle paused, and then to the seaman:

"And you, too, sir—although if you had been a little earlier I should feel more grateful and less sore."

The young man looked amused, and the seaman grinned.

"Nevertheless, gentlemen," continued the youth, "I feel deeply obliged to you. Allow me to introduce my uncle, Mr. Spence, and myself, George Spence."

Still more amused at the ceremoniously polite tone and manner of the speaker, the eldest midshipman said:

"And I'm Stephen Decatur; my comrade is James Lawrence, commonly called 'Laurie,' and our friend, if I'm not greatly mistaken, is Reuben Thomas, late of the *Constellation*, now master's mate of the *Enterprise*."

"Thankee, sir, and glad I am to get into such good company," answered the tall seaman, looking much pleased.

"Well, let's get aboard or somebody will be after us," admonished Decatur, and turning to Spence, continued:

"You were expected a week ago; you'll have to explain."

"Oh, that's simple enough. When uncle and I arrived from Philadelphia, ten days ago, we thought we might as well take a look about us. That occupied a week, and since then we've been quietly resting and enjoying ourselves. I should like to have had another week, but, of course, we couldn't expect the vessel to wait."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Decatur. "Thomas, you've sailed under Sterrett—what d'ye think he'd say to that?"

The master's mate grinned and grimaced, while Laurie said very gravely that it was really too bad Mr. Spence had not informed the captain of his wishes, "for then we might all have had a week ashore," adding in an undertone: "Hunting for what was left of you."

The party were now at the landing stage, where Mr. Spence parted with his nephew, after being earnestly assured by the others that they would "look out for him," and afterward by Laurie that all the officers were equal, and compelled to obey the same rules (which was true as far as it went, only) but very much relieved the old gentleman's fears as to the treatment his young relative would receive.

"Hanged if he ain't got more traps than the commodore!" growled one of the boat's crew when Spence's sea-chest, portmanteau, and several small bags were put aboard.

"More bone 'n' less baggage 'ud be better for the service," growled another, and certainly both remarks seemed justified by the quantity of baggage, and the delicate, almost effeminate, appearance of its owner.

Once on board the *Enterprise*, and having reported to the first officer, Mr. Dare—under whom Decatur and Laurie had already served one cruise, they repaired to the midshipmen's quarters to change their clothing.

"A glum-looking fellow—your first lieutenant. Is he very severe?"

Spence was busy divesting himself of a gorgeous neckerchief, and did not perceive the indignant glances his question caused to be cast at him.

"Is he old?" he continued.

"Three or four—perhaps five years older than I am," replied Decatur very quietly, and then his indignation getting the better of him, he burst forth:

"As for being glum—he's only just married and had to leave his wife! As for sternness or severity—if you had any other officer to report to, you would probably be under arrest at this moment!"

"Lieutenant Dare is the youngest man in his station, and the bravest and best in the service!" exclaimed Laurie, clinching Decatur's words.

"I must thank him," said Spence quietly.

"Well—you are a cool one!" exclaimed Decatur with a half-angry laugh, as he left the berth-room.

"But you must admit he does look stern?" said Spence to Laurie.

"Yes, but that is only since this morning, when he received a letter from a man in a shore-boat. He was laughing and talking with Mr. Porter, the second lieutenant, but when he opened the letter he grew white—white as a sheet, and staggered back as if some one hit him."

"Did he say anything?" asked Spence.

"When he staggered back he cried out, 'My God!' Then his face got hard and—Hush! Here comes Harper!"

A tall, heavily-built young fellow of seventeen entered, at that moment, and, noticing the sudden cessation of the conversation, he asked in an ugly, authoritative tone:

"What are you two conspiring about?"

"I fail to see how that concerns you," replied Spence in his usual quiet way.

"Eh? What's that?"

Harper could scarcely believe his ears, but stepped forward threateningly as he spoke.

"Don't you interfere with him, Harper!" boldly interposed Laurie.

This brought the wrath of the senior midshipman on himself, as well as on his new comrade.

"Now I'll give it to both of ye!" began Harper.

He produced a rope's-end, and the others were preparing to resist the bully, when the boat-swain's whistle was heard.

The captain was coming aboard; the officers must be on deck to receive him, so the contemplated punishment was deferred.

"Until to-night!" threatened Harper, as, in response to the call, all three hurried to the quarter-deck.

The *Enterprise* weighed anchor almost immediately after Captain Sterrett's arrival, and, a fair breeze having sprung up, the beautiful vessel was soon outside on her long cruise.

About the same time George Spence was experiencing the first qualms of conscience at having insisted on becoming a midshipman—which qualms were as nothing to those he was beginning to feel in the region of his stomach.

Then, too, there was the promised punishment to be expected from Harper, and the sick boy groaned as he thought of his helpless condition.

Decatur and Laurie were on deck attending to their duty, and George feared the worst when the senior midshipman came below; but Harper was not so brutal as to interfere with the sick boy.

"Sick, eh?" he said, on seeing George, and, restoring the rope's-end to his pocket, took his revenge by describing the delicious (?) sensations to be experienced by eating plenty of fat, *very fat*, bacon.

This, in its way, was worse than the colt, but fortunately did not last long—Decatur's entrance ending the torture.

"Get out!" exclaimed Decatur, seeing what was going on, and Harper "got."

CHAPTER II.

AN ABDUCTION OR ELOPEMENT OR WHAT

"STRICKLAND. These doings in my house distract me.

I met a fine gentleman; when I inquired who He was—why, he came to Clarinda. I met A footman, too, and he came to Clarinda. * * My wife had the character of a virtuous Woman—"

SUSPICIOUS HUSBAND.

LONDON was the first port the *Enterprise* touched at, and though the voyage thither was quick and uneventful, it gave officers and crew an opportunity to become acquainted.

The three midshipmen—Decatur, Laurie and Spence—became sworn friends, and were favorites with all on board, except their comrade, the senior midshipman, Harper, Williams, the steward, and Gorman, the master.

Decatur had thrashed Harper more than once, Laurie had offended the master by interfering on behalf of one of the boys on the second day out, with the result that the boy escaped punishment, and Spence, who was very dandified, incurred the enmity of the steward by treating him as if he were a servant—and a very inferior one, at that.

The stay at London was short, and then the frigate proceeded on her voyage along the coast of Spain, rounded Cape San Vincent, and then entered the Straits of Gibraltar, without encountering anything hostile.

"We'll drop anchor in the Bay of Gibraltar to-morrow night," said Decatur, as they entered the Straits; "at least I hope so, for we may get a chance to go ashore."

"Why?" asked Laurie.

"Oh, there's always something on—the garrison ball, or something of that sort."

As Decatur predicted, the *Enterprise* dropped anchor next day in the Bay of Gibraltar, alongside an English frigate, from which the word was quickly passed that the officers of the garrison were giving a ball in honor of the officers of the ship.

"We're sure to get an invitation," declared Decatur, gleefully, and again he proved a true prophet.

Captain Sterrett was a strict disciplinarian, and when he ordered that every man who accepted an invitation to the ball to be on board at seven next morning, there was little fear of any failing to be found waiting for the boat at that hour. The captain himself was to return at nine that night, as the sally-port would not be opened after that hour, except by special permission.

Lieutenant Dare, who still maintained his gloomy reserve, was one of the few who failed to avail themselves of the opportunity to go ashore.

He was leaning over the side of the ship, buried in deep, and, by the expression of his countenance, by no means pleasant, thought, when he was startled by the appearance of Spence, climbing up the ladder near which he was leaning.

"If you please, sir, I have a message from Laurie," said the midshipman, as he gained the deck.

"I am to tell you that Grace, or Vernier, is now at the ball, or was when I left there. If he leaves before you get there, Mr. Decatur and Laurie will follow him."

"Vernier at the ball? Impossible!" exclaimed Dare, very much agitated, and then, glancing at his watch, continued:

"It's too late, anyhow; the sally port is now closed—here's the gig!"

"I rowed as fast as I could," said the midshipman.

"Yes, yes. Thank you, my lad. Now tell me what occurred from the time you landed until you left."

"Yes, sir. After landing and putting off our boat-cloaks, we were invited to the refreshment room—Laurie, Mr. Decatur and myself—by one of the officers."

"While there, Gorman and Harper came in with an officer—at least he looked and acted at home."

"You know, Mr. Dare, we don't pull with them, so we avoided them until Laurie got a good look at their friend. Then he called Mr. Decatur's attention to him, and then Mr. Decatur said to go over and listen to what they were saying."

"I wouldn't think of doing it for any one else, and only then because Laurie said he knew the stranger was your enemy, and all is fair in love and war."

"Well?" said the lieutenant, not unkindly or even impatiently, but deeply interested.

"Well, sir, I heard him—Vernier—ask if you were coming ashore, and two or three times if you had received any letters since leaving port—to both of which inquiries Harper replied, 'No!'"

"That was all I heard, and then I came here."

"Thank you, Mr. Spence, thank you. I'm sorry you will lose your night's fun at the ball."

The youth was delighted. He would have given an arm for half as much.

"You will kindly take my watch for a few minutes," continued the lieutenant, and that completed the conquest of the midshipman.

"Now I understand why Decatur and Laurie are so enthusiastic about him. I wonder what caused such a change in him?" soliloquized Spence, as he proudly took charge of the watch.

Below, Dare was repeating the midshipman's story, and, having finished, drew a letter from his pocket.

"Now read that, and you'll partly understand my interest in this scoundrel, Vernier—whom I first knew as Midshipman Grace, of the United States."

The letter was as follows:

"Your wife is with me—this time of her own free will. To prove what I say, she signs with me—"

"VERNIER,
"EMILY."

"Now you can imagine what my life has been since receiving that," said Dare, when the captain had finished reading.

"It's very odd—that's certain," returned Captain Sterrett; "but the boys may ascertain something before morning. I suppose ye believe this to be a forgery, now?"

"By Jove! captain, I believe you've hit it!" exclaimed Dare, a light breaking over his face, and showing itself in his tone and actions. "I've

never had or seen a line of my wife's handwriting, and except that it looks something like her signature, and is positively on her paper, I've no good reason to believe she wrote that."

"Well, I'm glad to see such a change in you, Mr. Dare, I can assure you. Let's try a little of my Madeira on the strength of it."

Leaving the captain, the lieutenant returned to the deck and relieved Midshipman Spence from further duty, although the midshipman quietly, and by his own invitation, continued to walk the watch with Dare.

There was a silent sympathy expressed in this that pleased the young lieutenant, and feeling a little curious, he asked:

"Are you from New York, Mr. Spence?"

"No, sir. I've always lived with my uncle in Philadelphia; and that reminds me of two things, Mr. Dare: first, I've never thanked you for passing over my failure to report for duty at the proper time, and, second, just as we were getting under way, a shore-boat came under the stern, and a man in the stern-sheets asked if you were still on board. I was leaning over the taffrail at the time, and told him you were."

"And then?"

"He laughed, and rowed away."

"Was it this Vernier?"

"I don't know, sir. It might have been; I paid very little attention to him."

Again the lieutenant sought the captain and their conversation ended with:

"Very well, Mr. Dare; it shall be as you say; but, as this fellow is a deserter, as well as an expirate, we are in duty bound to endeavor to seize him. When we get him, I'll guarantee to get at the truth about that letter."

But Captain Sterrett was overlooking the important first words in the famous French recipe for cooking rabbits—"First get your rabbit"—and it was not until the boats came off at seven next morning, not only without information regarding Vernier, but minus two midshipmen, that he realized the importance of first getting the rabbit.

Inquiry afloat and ashore revealed nothing. Had the earth opened and swallowed them, Decatur and Laurie could not have disappeared more completely.

CHAPTER III.

A STERN CHASE.

"The cry's 'A sail! A sail!'
Brace high each nerve to dare the foe-man,
One secret prayer to aid the right,
And many a secret thought to woman!
Now spread the flutt'ring canvas wide
And dash the foaming sea aside;
The cry's 'A sail! A sail!'"

MIDSHIPMAN SPENCE had given Mr. Dare an accurate description of what took place up to the time he left the refreshment-room at the garrison ball, and he was confirmed by Harper and Gorman regarding their being in company with "an officer of the English frigate," but inquiry aboard that vessel proved that there was no such officer.

"There was a man such as you describe," said the first officer of the English frigate, "but nobody seemed to know him, although I suspect he belonged to that piratical-looking schooner that dropped anchor after dark last night and left before daybreak this morning."

Captain Sterrett was very angry over the loss of the two midshipmen, the mystery surrounding their disappearance, and the time lost in searching for them.

"We can lose no more time, Mr. Dare, he said, late in the afternoon after the ball; 'we must join the commodore as soon as possible. I am sorry for your sake, as well as for those boys, but we must get under way at once.'"

"Very well, sir," replied the first officer, quite cheerfully, as he turned to pass the order to the boatswain, whose shrill calls immediately began echoing through the frigate, as sail was made and the anchor raised.

The *Enterprise* was soon under way, and made all sail, steering for Naples, where she was to join the commodore's squadron.

"If we overhaul that schooner, I should like to search her, notwithstanding she shows English colors," said Dare, after they were fairly under way.

"It's risky business," returned the captain, after a little reflection; "but, from what the Englishman said, I think we can chance it. Besides, I've an idea that wherever we find that friend of yours, there we'll find those two boys."

"I agree with you, sir. The lads were probably following him, when they were seized and carried aboard."

Midshipman Spence—who, by the way, was now honored with a sobriquet, as all favorites are by seamen, and had been dubbed Gentleman George—overheard the foregoing conversation, and determined to keep a sharp lookout for the schooner.

He felt miserable without his two comrades. Harper and Gorman made it unpleasant for him at all times and places where it was possible, and when he sought Lieutenant Dare for permission to stay aloft with a glass, the latter, understanding the situation, gladly assented.

George had eyes sharp as an eyrie eagle, and shortly after going aloft next morning discovered a vessel bearing toward the *Enterprise*, and reported the fact to Lieutenant Dare, who in turn reported it to the captain.

"A polacre-rigged ship—shows English colors like ourselves, and looks no more entitled to," reported Lieutenant Porter, who had been aloft examining the stranger as she drew near.

"From Tripoli without a doubt," decided Dare, a little later, and the commodore ordered sail shortened and the drummer to beat to quarters.

On came the stranger until within pistol-shot range; then it was seen that she carried fourteen six-pounders—two more than the *Enterprise*—and about the same number of men—ninety.

The identity of the stranger was already established.

"It's Mahomet Sous's ship—the Tripoli—that's him—that big Turk on the quarter-deck," averred Hawkins, the gunner, who had been a slave-prisoner in Algiers.

"Hail her!" commanded Captain Sterrett, and the gunner's words were confirmed, with the addition that she was just from Malta, and was "cruising after Americans, but had poor luck!"

"Run up our colors and demand her surrender! Stand ready to rake her!"

When the Algerian saw the red ensign coming down she evidently suspected something, and in response to Captain Sterrett's summons hauled down her colors.

But, Captain Sterrett was not deceived by this apparent submission, and by his instructions Dare kept the *Enterprise* ready to cross the stern of the Tripoli, which, as he had the wind of the latter, and was the fastest sailer, the lieutenant did not find a difficult task.

Meantime the American colors had been hoisted, and finding he could not get away, Mahomet Sous, in response to an imperative summons from the *Enterprise*, hauled up the Bashaw's flag, at the same time firing a volley of small-arms.

The *Enterprise* immediately crossed the Tripoli's stern, delivering a murderous broadside, part round and part grape-shot; then wearing round and skillfully avoiding the enemy's fire, the other broadside of solid shot was poured into her hull.

This had the effect of bringing the Tripoli's colors down on the run, and Captain Sterrett directed Lieutenant Dare to take the cutter and board her, but before the boat could be lowered, the lieutenant, regardless of consequences, thundered:

"Hard up! To your guns, lads!" and as the helm was put up, and the captains of the guns, who had dropped their lanyards, supposing the fight was over, sprung to their places, the wily Turk was forced to exchange broadsides instead of raking the *Enterprise* as he had hoped by the ruse of striking his colors to get into position to execute his treacherous purpose.

Enraged at this piece of treachery, Captain Sterrett shouted:

"Man the larboard guns! 'Bout ship and rake her in stays! Sharp now, lads, and we'll pay him for that dirty trick!"

Again and again this was repeated by the enraged and more skillful Americans, until the mizzenmast of the Tripoli fell over the side, all her lower spars and rigging carried away with it. The *Enterprise* then set her courses, which had been hauled up, and shooting ahead, began hulling the enemy from a raking position, ready when the captain's humor changed to bear down and rake her.

"I'll sink her where she lays!" exclaimed Sterrett, savagely, and, as though he had heard the words, Mahomet Sous struck his colors for the third time.

"She's struck again, sir!" announced Dare.

"Let her strike!" returned the captain, who was himself pointing one of the guns.

"But, will we not be as bad as they are if we fire on them now, Mr. Dare?"

It was Gentleman George who asked the question, and as he stood between the captain and first officer, the former, of course, heard it.

He had the lanyard in his hand when the middy spoke, but dropped it with angry look, which quickly changed to a smile, as he said:

"Mr. Porter, take the cutter and board her. We'll run alongside directly if there's any trouble."

But it was not necessary; Mahomet Sous had had quite enough. The Tripoli was a dismantled wreck, with eighty-one shots in her hull and twenty of her crew killed and thirty wounded, while the Enterprise, by her wonderfully fine maneuvering, had not lost a man or suffered the least injury.

When Captain Sterrett saw the Algerian boarded without opposition, he took his revenge by saying:

"Mr. Spence, take a boat and tell Mr. Porter to dismantle that ship and let her go back to Algiers a wreck!"

"A bitter revenge!" thought the middy, as he took his seat in the boat; and it was a terrible revenge, for, notwithstanding his hard fight, Mahomet Sous was disgraced on returning to Algiers, receiving the punishment of the worst of criminals—five hundred strokes of the bastinado!

As the boat left the ship, Gentleman George noticed that a strong wind was blowing up, but paid no attention to it at the time, and it was not until the work of completing the wrecking of the Tripoli was nearly finished that he became aware that it was blowing half a gale.

A jury-mast having been rigged, and some absolutely necessary repairs made in the rigging of the Tripoli, Mr. Porter prepared to return to the Enterprise, now lying hove-to two cables astern, when George noticed a strange sail bearing toward them.

"That's an American—and by gum! the same we saw at Gibraltar!" exclaimed Reuben Thomas, on sighting the stranger, which was tearing along before the gale under reefed mainsail and storm staysail.

Thomas's assertion was quickly confirmed by the orders from the frigate to come aboard at once, and by the immediate preparations for pursuing the schooner.

"She's goin' about, sir," remarked the master's mate, as the cutter pulled to the frigate, and as they came aboard, Dare's voice could be heard:

"Topmen, aloft there! Stand by to clew up the royals!" and a moment later, the order:

"In royals! Lower away!"

"Look out!" warned the master, "it's comin'!"

And as the wind increased, the captain ordered:

"Hands reef topsails in stays, Mr. Dare!"

"Ay, ay, sir! 'Bout ship!"

The helm was put down, topsails lowered and reefed in stays, and the chase began.

In a short time it became apparent that the Enterprise was gaining on the chase and would overhaul her within an hour if the conditions remained unchanged; but, when only a quarter-mile astern, there came a change.

There was a small boat towing astern of the schooner, and at this point Decatur and Laurie were seen brought on deck and bundled into it.

"They're going to set them adrift!" exclaimed Dare. "It's our two midshipmen, Decatur and Lawrence, as I live!"

As he spoke, the painter was cut and the small boat was left tossing in the schooner's billowy wake. At the same moment the maintopsail of the frigate was snapped off by the stiff wind.

CHAPTER IX.

AT AND AFTER THE BALL.

"I the name of truth
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show?" MACBETH.

THE delay caused by rounding to, to rescue the two midshipmen from their perilous position, and the loss of the topmast, as well as the clearing away of the wreckage, rendered pursuit hopeless, if not dangerous, for the schooner was heading straight for the port of Algiers.

"She's going to join the Algerian pirates," were Decatur's first words on getting aboard the frigate.

"Just from New York, and Vernier is captain," added Laurie.

"Was my—did you see any one else whom you knew on board?" asked Dare, rather nervously.

"No! and we saw all hands," promptly replied Laurie.

"Thank God!" fervently exclaimed the first lieutenant, adding:

"You had better go below and change your clothes before telling your story."

As both the boy middies were drenched, they were glad to avail themselves of this permission, and, accompanied by the delighted Spence, sought the midshipman's berth, where the latter learned what had happened after he left them in the ball-room.

Vernier had no particular desire to injure either Decatur or Laurie, but finding they were watching, and had evidently recognized him, determined to prevent their reporting his presence to Dare by seizing them. He had obtained special permission to pass through the sally-port after the ball was over, and having notified the coxswain of his gig what he intended doing, the entire boat's crew were in waiting when Vernier, followed by Decatur and Laurie, left the ball-room.

"Too much wine," was Vernier's remark in passing the English sentinel, explaining the appearance of the two midshipmen who had been stunned only a short distance away, and were being carried to the boat.

This explanation seemed ample, at the time, but, when inquiries were made later, the soldier was afraid to reveal what he knew of the affair.

Nothing but the imminent danger of capture caused Vernier to forego his determination of carrying Decatur and Laurie to Algiers, where, as he informed them, they could choose between joining him and being sold as slaves, as hundreds of captives were sold to the fanatical Arabs—as the Algerians were.

As may be imagined, the captain and first officer were not the only ones to whom it was necessary to repeat this story, and by the time Naples was reached the three midshipmen found themselves regarded as heroes, although, as Harper said, the only reason to assign for it was that "two of them had managed to get into a bad scrape, and the other fellow was impudent the captain."

Still it was so, and after leaving Naples, through the interest Lieutenant Dare took in them, all three of the spirited boys gained fresh laurels.

"We are too late," announced Captain Sterrett, as they entered the Bay of Naples, and inquiry ashore proved his assertion correct: the commodore, having borrowed six gunboats and two bomb-ketches from the King of Naples, had sailed in his own ship for Tripoli, the previous day, leaving orders for the Enterprise to follow.

As Captain Sterrett would not consent to remain longer than was necessary to get in fresh stores and water, the officers of the Court of Naples determined to give a masked ball the next evening, and the invitation to the officers of the Enterprise being given in the name of the king, the captain could not very well offend the power which so recently had afforded substantial aid to his commodore and country, by refusing it.

Accordingly, next day was spent in preparing for the masquerade, and, through Lieutenant Dare's influence, the first to go ashore to secure costumes were "the three inseparables."

"I think the proper costume for Laurie would be that of a monk—he's so grave," suggested Spence, as they strolled along in search of costumes.

"And yours," he continued, addressing Decatur, "should be that of a devil—suits your temper, you know."

"Well, there'll be no difficulty about selecting yours," laughed Decatur.

"No—not the slightest!" assured Laurie. "The cap and bells, with a donkey's ears, would denote your impudence and egotism, as well as your knowledge, to perfection."

This was uttered so vehemently that all three laughed, but that was the way it was finally arranged—minus the donkey's ears.

Having secured the costumes and lodgings for the night at an inn, they strolled about until evening came, when they dressed and went to the ball.

On the way various plans were laid regarding Harper and Gorman, and, on discovering Lieutenant Dare in the ball-room, Spence was detailed to ascertain the costumes worn by the former, which he managed quite easily to do—reporting to his comrades thus:

"They were too late to secure fancy costumes, so they came disguised as gentlemen in evening dress, and as they are simply masked, we'll have no trouble in finding them."

Laurie went into a brown study for several minutes, from which he emerged to say:

"Look here, George! I've changed my mind about your costume. I wonder if we could get a

dress from some of the servants—a woman's, of course!"

"What do you mean?" indignantly demanded Spence.

Laurie looked meditatively at the delicate figure and handsome features of the speaker as he replied:

"Why, don't you see, if we had rigged you up as a girl, we could have some fun with Gorman? They say he falls in love with every fresh face; so, if you made up to him, he'd be sure to bite, for you are not absolutely ugly."

"Thanks. I suppose you think that's smart," said George, half-angrily.

But the idea was carried out with the aid of a good-natured servant girl, who parted with a pretty dress for five times its cost, and then they sought the victim.

He was quickly found, and when Gorman noticed a pretty girl alone and regarding him attentively, if not admiringly, he "bit," as predicted, and was soon engaged in an outrageous flirtation with Signorina Xeres.

Then, to the delight of the conspirators, Harper appeared on the scene and sought to outshine his friend; but the lady managed things so impartially that each began to wish the other anywhere but at the ball.

"Now that they're ready to fight, let's go claim her," said Decatur.

And a minute later a fiery devil, accompanied by a solemn monk, stood before Signorina Xeres angrily demanding that she depart for home at once, which the lady promptly refused to do and appealed to her friends for protection.

Gorman responded, demanding by what right they interfered with the lady.

"By right of a brother, sir!" (in arms—mentally.) "And you shall account to me, sir, for encouraging my foolish sister! My brother will attend to your companion for his part in this unmanly matter!"

This, said in a low tone, attracted considerable attention—especially as through their talkativeness the identity of the gentlemen in evening dress was known, and the affair reached the ears of Captain Sterrett just about the time the weeping signorina was leaving the ball-room with her brothers.

Lieutenant Dare was present when the captain, looking very stern, started to investigate the alleged misconduct of his officers. The officer partly guessed what had happened, for, although ignorant of the change in Spence's costume, he connected the disappearance of the jester with the appearance of the signorina, accompanied by the devil and the monk.

As the captain would be very angry if the truth were known, Dare sought the three conspirators to get them out of the way. He found them in the refreshment-room—Spence once more in the cap and bells.

"You must get out of here," he warned; "the captain is investigating this Signorina Xeres affair. Of course, you don't know anything about it, but come along—you must take a walk."

There was no disputing the order and the four started for the inn, in high spirits, doing their utmost to make up for losing the balance of the fun at the ball, and succeeded in enjoying themselves so well that people from the ball were crowding past in the early morning hours before they reached their destination.

"Come, boys—we must hurry!" urged Dare, and as he spoke those ahead began to do the same.

"Must have thought you were talking to them," suggested Laurie lazily, but soon a bright light ahead showed them the cause.

A large frame house was on fire; and, worse still—as they drew nearer, two white-robed figures could be seen mutely imploring assistance, while a gray-haired, feeble old man ran wildly among the crowd, offering all he possessed for the rescue of those in the burning building.

It was the lower part of the house which was burning, and no one seemed to care to face the flames at the entrance until the Americans appeared on the scene.

"Good heavens! Look at the women!" cried Laurie.

"Yes—and, good heavens, look at the fools looking at them!" returned Decatur, hot with wrath.

"Never mind them! Come on! Laurie and George try up the front! You and I the entrance, Decatur!"

The lieutenant dashed forward as he spoke, but the crowd barred his way.

"The stairs are burning!" cried one, in English, at the same time throwing up his arms warningly.

"Out of the way, you fool!" shouted Decatur, emphasizing the order by knocking the man down, and through the opening thus made Dare plunged forward.

The midshipmen followed, and then the crowd witnessed a strange sight: a man dressed to represent the devil rushing through the flames at the entrance, while a monk and a jester started to climb by means of the vines and projections on the front of the house.

The crowd watched the climbers with breathless astonishment—those gone through the entrance were already given up as lost. Laurie, the stronger and more experienced of the two, made the better headway, notwithstanding the flames were bursting through the woodwork more fiercely on his side.

At length Laurie was within reaching distance of his window, when it was suddenly seen that the man dressed as a devil was hanging out to help him, but glancing at the other side the climber noticed that his companion seemed faint, and shook his head toward him, although the flames were bursting out all around where he was himself hanging.

Decatur understood, and rushing to the other window dragged the exhausted Spence through the window, while Laurie hung on to the sill of his. At the same moment Dare appeared below with one of the women; then Laurie was helped through the window, and, a little later, Decatur appeared below, carrying the other woman, followed by Laurie fairly carrying Spence.

How the crowd cheered, while Captain Sterrett, Lieutenant Porter and others of the Enterprise rushed forward to meet and greet their gallant comrades.

CHAPTER V.

LAURIE AND THE MASTER.

OF the four, Laurie had suffered most. The minute he hung waiting to see his comrade safe had cost him many severe burns, but it was not until he saw Spence safe in the inn, which was only a short distance away, that he gave in.

And then it was discovered how badly he had been burned—Mr. Mackay, the father of the rescued girls, being the one to make the discovery.

"Here, here!" he called to the doctor, who was attending to Spence; "here is a more pressing case, I fear."

"You are right, sir. This young man has suffered most of all from the fire," averred the doctor, after a hasty examination.

After bandaging Laurie's wounds, and taking a final look at the others, the doctor prepared to leave, promising to return later in the morning.

"This is the only one needing particular care," he remarked, indicating Laurie, "and when Julia or Agnes are sufficiently recovered, you might allow them to look after him until I can secure a nurse. It will not do to trust him to the care of the inn servants."

And so it happened that, when Laurie awakened with a feverish thirst, his wants were supplied by two beautiful girls, whom he at first mistook for angels, and their actions did not tend to deceive him.

Mr. Mackay was a Scotchman who had grown very wealthy in the wine trade, having married the daughter of a Neapolitan merchant, and succeeded him in business. Laurie, of course, knew nothing of this, and was much surprised when Julia, the elder of the two girls, and about his own age, as she gave him a cool drink, said in excellent English:

"You are not to talk or excite yourself, Mr. Lawrence."

"Oh, come now, that's not fair!" protested Laurie. "And, anyhow, don't call me Mr. Lawrence."

"You should say 'Laurie,' Julia," interposed Agnes, and both the others looked at her—the youth gratefully, the sister with a queer smile.

Then Laurie kept quiet, while the girls took turns in telling him who they were, and how grateful to him and his friends, for somehow the lion's share of glory fell to Laurie.

"But I didn't do anything except get a little burnt," he protested.

"Oh, yes! You found Agnes lying senseless in the smoke, and gave her to Mr. Decatur as being strongest and surest to get her safe out, while you took care of Mr. Spence, who says you saved his life as well as Agnes's."

"That's all bosh!" returned Laurie, *politely*, but neither of the sisters appeared to notice it, and further conversation was stopped by the entrance of Surgeon Parkes, Captain Sterrett and Mr. Mackay.

The latter was very much put out by the sur-

geon's declaration that Laurie might be removed to the ship next day, and wished to consult his own doctor on that point, but was overruled by Captain Sterrett.

"We want Mr. Lawrence on board," he decided, "but if we find removal gives him pain, he will stay here until we return."

That settled the question, and after being quizzed by the surgeon, overpowered with thanks by Mr. Mackay, and receiving a few kind words from the captain, Laurie was left to the care of his nurses!

The day passed only too quickly, and with evening came Decatur and Spence—the last of many callers during the day, so that, with the little rest he received, it was rather surprising that Laurie was in condition to send word next morning that the litter upon which it was proposed to remove him was unnecessary—he would walk.

Accordingly, after taking leave of Mr. Mackay and his family, and promising to return if he had an opportunity, Laurie, escorted by his two comrades, made quite a triumphal march to the ship, where he was received with three hearty cheers!

Gentleman George had been telling the story of Signorina Xeres until the captain had caught a fair idea of the truth, as was proved by his saying, as Laurie saluted him:

"One rescue every twenty-four hours is enough, Mr. Lawrence. We can't afford to lose the services of an officer for *every* signorina."

Laurie looked confused amid the general amusement, and the captain covered his retreat by ordering the first lieutenant to get under way at once, but, the middy once out of the way, suddenly remembered that as eight bells (12 o'clock) would strike shortly, it would be better to pipe all hands for dinner, and make sail at two bells in the middle watch—1 P. M.

This was done, and Laurie felt so well after dinner that he would not remain below, so, taking a glass, he took up his position on the poop.

Along about one bell in the dog-watch (4:30 P. M.), Laurie arose and climbed to the cross-trees, from which point he was heard hailing the lookout at the maintop.

Mr. Porter, who had been ill since the night of the ball, was in his berth, the captain and Dare were in the cabin, and the master was officer of the watch.

Spence's remarks about the Signorina Xeres led the master and Harper to suspect to whom they were indebted for the trouble at the ball, and when the latter said:

"Lookout's been asleep—he's gone aloft to warn him there's a sail in sight," the master saw an opportunity for revenge.

As if to confirm Harper's words, the lookout hailed the deck just as Laurie descended, announcing a sail about ten miles ahead, but so eager was the master that, without making the usual inquiry as to her course and appearance, he at once addressed, or rather attacked, Laurie.

"You went aloft to warn the lookout of that sail just reported?" he asserted rather than asked.

(The captain and Dare, having heard the hail from aloft, came on deck at that moment, unobserved by Gorman or Laurie, or by Harper, who stood beside the master to enjoy the expected punishment—for, like all those seldom in command, the latter was proportionally tyrannical and abusive.)

"I went aloft to inquire what kind of a craft, if it was a craft at all, that I thought I saw," replied Laurie, with provoking calmness.

"Then you *did* warn him?" triumphantly.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. Perhaps he would tell you," was the still more provoking reply.

"You should, as you well know, have reported to me the moment you saw her. Now, sir, why didn't you? Answer me!"

The master was fairly white with rage, and Laurie's smiling indifference, and the knowledge that most of the ship's company were listening, made matters worse.

"I didn't say I saw anything—I merely thought I did. As the lookout at the mast-head could, of course, be more sure, I inquired of him."

Laurie's reply only added fuel to the fire, and the master roared:

"Then, sir, you had better go to the mast-head yourself—and stay there till I call you down!"

"I haven't heard any report of that vessel yet, Mr. Gorman," said a stern voice that made the master jump.

"No—no—sir," he stammered; "I've been overhauling Mr. Lawrence for not doing his duty."

"Mr. Lawrence is not on duty," returned the captain, sternly, and turning to Laurie, asked: "Did you make her out?"

"Yes, sir. She's a frigate—foreign-looking, and steering the same course as ourselves."

"Thank you, Mr. Lawrence, for your vigilance. It's fortunate somebody keeps awake. Nice state of affairs! Nice state of affairs! Mast-head, eh? Mast-head, indeed!"

Captain Sterrett was in a thundering rage, and as he ranged up and down the quarter-deck, it looked as though the master stood a fair chance of being mast-headed himself.

"She has hauled her wind, sir," hailed Decatur, who had gone to the topmast cross-trees.

"Another man awake!" commented the captain, with a withering look at the master.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENGAGEMENT—MISSING MIDSHIPMEN.

"Ships are but boards; sailors but men;
There be land-rats, and water-rats, water-thieves
And land thieves; I mean pirates."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE Enterprise was under all possible sail, and, when the hands were piped to supper, they were within four miles of the chase, which had thrown out English colors, but that was no satisfactory proof of her being a friend, and the meal was a hurried one.

A new frigate, the John Adams, was expected to join the Mediterranean Squadron, and remarking that the stranger, which was larger and heavier than the Enterprise, answered the description of that vessel, Captain Sterrett hoisted the American colors. The stranger immediately hauled down the English colors and hoisted American—so promptly that it looked suspicious.

It was sunset when the Enterprise had arrived within two miles of the stranger; the private signal had been thrown out, but had not been answered—possibly because it was growing too dark to distinguish the colors of the flags.

Just before dark, the stranger put her head toward the Enterprise, which had now come stem down to her, and the captain said:

"Beat to quarters, Mr. Dare—a few minutes will decide whether we've to deal with friend or foe."

It was a difficult situation, and one demanding much caution, it being necessary, on the one hand, to be fully prepared, and not allow an enemy the advantage to be derived from inaction, and on the other, the necessity of prudence that friends and countrymen might not be assaulted.

Captain Sterrett had hoisted the private night-signal, but here again, from his sails intervening, it was difficult for the stranger to make it out, so, determined that there should be no mistake from want of precaution on his part, he hauled up his courses, and brailled up his driver, that the signal might be clearly seen.

The vessels were now about three cables' lengths apart, and lights were seen on the quarter-deck of the stranger as if about to answer, but she continued on her course, keeping half a cable's-length to the leeward of the Enterprise, until the bow guns of each were abreast of the other, when she hailed in English:

"Ship ahoy! What ship is that?"

"United States ship Enterprise!" replied the captain, who stood on the hammocks. "What ship is that?"

By this time, the other frigate had passed half her length clear of the beam of the Enterprise, and at the same time an indistinct "United States ship"—was heard, a broadside from her guns (purposely trained aft) was poured into the Enterprise, doing considerable execution.

Furious at being tricked, Captain Sterrett was all over the ship, apparently, at the same time.

"Bout ship! Man the larboard guns! Quick, lads, quick!" he cried, urging them on with: "We'll pay him back for that! Lively now, and rake him in stays!"

Around went the Enterprise with that rapidity for which American sailors were then celebrated, and catching the Algerian—for such she was—poured her broadside into the latter's stern.

The enemy seemed anxious to get into action, and hauled up her courses to await the Enterprise.

In five minutes the two vessels were running alongside, exchanging murderous broadsides at little more than pistol-shot range—the damage inflicted being about equal.

It will be remembered by those who read of Laurie's first cruise, that his *forte* was gunnery, and after the combat had been going on a half-hour, an idea occurred to the midshipman, after submitting it to his tutor, Hawkins, the master gunner, he laid before the captain.

"Why not focus the fire of all our guns, captain?" he asked.

Captain Sterrett stared in surprise, and Laurie continued:

"Fire those amidships as they are, direct for her main-channels. Train those abaft the beam more and more forward, and those before the beam more and more aft—gradually, of course. Then, heavy as she is, we'll tear the side out of her!"

The captain continued to stare; he could hardly realize that it was one of his midshipmen was talking.

"Come!" he exclaimed, after a moment, and taking Laurie by the arm, helped him to the main deck. "Now go forward and help Hawkins point the guns, and fire all at the word!" he continued.

Laurie went forward, and as the firing of the Enterprise was necessarily slackened, the enemy cheered, imagining she was about to strike, but when the word was given, and the concentrated broadside poured in, they were sorely undeceived.

Three of the Algerian's midships ports were blown into one, guns dismounted, and her mainmast fell over the side.

Then the Enterprise forged ahead of the hampered frigate, and poured in grape and canister, from her upper deck carronades, to impede the labor of clearing away the wreckage.

This was all very good fun for the gunners, but it did not suit the fiery spirit of Decatur, who, standing between Laurie and Spence on the quarter-deck, and unconscious of the proximity of the captain and Dare, burst out:

"It's all very good, but we are losing men, and must wind up by sinking her—if we can! Now if we board her we've got a prize to show for our losses."

"You're just right, Steve!" warmly assented Gentleman George.

"What d'ye think of your friends?" asked the captain, in a low tone.

"Well—I must confess I think they are right," laughingly replied the lieutenant.

"So, Mr. Decatur, you think we should board her?" said the captain.

Decatur started, but recovering, replied, boldly:

"I didn't mean to criticise your judgment, sir, but she has too many men, and we may lose her if we don't!"

"And you, too, gentlemen?" continued the captain, in the same half-serious way.

"Yes, sir!" came the simultaneous response from Laurie and Spence.

"Very well, we'll try her by the board," said the captain, laughing at the unanimity of opinion. "Mr. Dare, give them one more broadside and then run her alongside!"

Another and more deadly discharge of the carronades was delivered as the Enterprise, coned by Dare, ran alongside the Algerian, but, notwithstanding the havoc it worked, when Captain Sterrett, at the head of his men, boarded the enemy, they met with desperate opposition.

The three midshipmen were close to the captain when he boarded, and fortunately for him. They followed him into the thick of the fight, where the voice and arm of the Algerian captain were heard and felt strongest. Here Captain Sterrett slipped in a pool of blood and fell, but the three inseparables, now backed by Dare, formed round him and beat off the enemy until he arose.

Again Captain Sterrett tried to reach the other captain, and this time succeeded in crossing swords with him, but had scarcely done so when the Algerians, who were still superior in numbers, came with a rush, and the captain was knocked down by a chance blow, which came near ending his earthly career, for the Algerian captain rushed forward with uplifted sword.

This time Decatur warded off the blow, and Gentleman George shot the Algerian dead—practically ending the fight, for when Dare came like a tiger, leading the Enterprise men, the enemy fled before them, and the frigate was won.

As soon as the main deck had been cleared, Captain Sterrett ordered the hatches to be put on, while he hastened to attend to the condition of his own ship and its company.

It was daylight before anything like order was restored on the decks of the Enterprise; the

water was still smooth, and she had hung on by a hawser to the prize, but her sails had been furled, decks cleared, guns secured, and buckets were dashing away the blood from her planks and gun-carriages when the sun shone upon them. The wounded had been put into their hammocks, although there were still several cases of amputation to attend to, the carpenter had repaired the dangerous shot-holes, and by the time all this was done, what Captain Sterrett did not, himself, know before, of his debt to the three inseparables, he learned from the talk of his crew—and a great deal more than actual facts.

Lieutenant Dare had been left in charge of the prize, and not seeing any of his three heroes (according to the crew) aboard the Enterprise, Captain Sterrett thought they had stayed with their friend, but when he went over to the other vessel to see what was needed, and incidentally inquired for them, he found the three midshipmen missing, although among neither dead nor wounded, and he was very much concerned as to their fate. Then, too, he had lost his expert gunner, Hawkins, and his best seaman, Reuben Thomas, the master's mate.

"It's very strange," said the captain.

"And very sad," added Dare mournfully.

CHAPTER VII.

WHERE THEY WENT AND WHAT THEY DID.

"Mars dote on you for his novices."

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

LIEUTENANT DARE was sorely puzzled over the disappearance of his friends, but refused to believe that those whom he had seen alive and unhurt after the engagement was over could be among the bodies thrown overboard, while the decks were being cleared before daylight.

Every man of the crew was sorrowfully interested in the fate of the six men, for, in addition to those already mentioned, it was found that Maxwell, the giant captain of the maintop, was also gone, but the first lieutenant was like a man who had lost his brothers, and when the captain went back to the Enterprise to send men to help in making repairs, began repeating his inquiries among the prize-crew.

"Look-a-here, Jack," said one, seeing Dare coming around again, "if he axes me ag'in, I'm a-goin' t' tell. I can't stand it—he's like a father that's lost a dozen young-uns."

"All right, Jim; I feel that way myself," returned the other, and when the lieutenant reached "Jack," he was electrified to learn that the missing men had gone off in the cutter just before dawn "to capture a gunboat."

Lieutenant Dare was not given to profanity, but he certainly did make use of an expression, regarding the sanity of his friends, which is not countenanced by polite society. Then joy at the assurance that his friends were, as far as known, still alive, caused him to laugh, and go over to the Enterprise to acquaint Captain Sterrett with what he had learned.

"We must run inshore and find the scamps. I hope they have not been captured," said the captain, on hearing Dare's story.

"I hope not. I'll go aloft—perhaps I can make them out. I'm not inclined to worry much, for those six are equal to an ordinary dozen—the boys in wit, and the men in strength and skill."

"Well, let's hope they'll get back safe with a prize," said the captain, laughingly.

"I shouldn't be surprised," rejoined Dare. "Laurie led them off, I'll wager; but as he invariably falls on his feet, they will probably turn up all safe."

The lieutenant went aloft, but there was nothing in sight as far as he could see, and the captain ordered that the two vessels cruise along the coast as soon as the repairs were completed.

And now to explain what became of the three midshipmen and their faithful henchmen.

Just before daylight, while aboard the Algerian frigate, Gentleman George made out a small boat some distance to the windward.

"It's an Algerian gunboat," declared Hawkins, when called upon for his opinion. "She came out too late to be of any help, 'n' now she's tryin' to steal back. The wind's died out 'n' they're towin' her."

"I say, Steve," said Laurie, "wouldn't it be a fine thing to take the cutter and capture that gunboat? We could take Hawkins, Thomas and Maxwell, and in the dark it wouldn't be much of a job for six."

This proposition appealed strongly to Decatur's love of adventure, and, after a moment's thought, he approved of it, at the same time asking:

"But how can we get away? The cutter must be armed."

"Oh, I'll fix that," calmly replied Laurie, and he did.

The three men were willing to risk punishment, and, with the aid of two others, armed the cutter, which, in the general confusion, and favored by the darkness, slipped away unperceived.

A half-hour's stiff rowing brought them close to the gunboat, and then pulling cautiously to the stern, Laurie, in the bow, made fast to her.

"I can see only two men—one at the wheel, about half-asleep, and the other in the bow," whispered Laurie, after peeping on deck.

"Rest 'r' in the boat towin'," said Hawkins, and the sound of the sweeps towing confirmed his words.

"All right! Let's climb aboard—we've got her sure enough," said Decatur.

"Hold on—the man at the wheel first," said James.

Lightly as a cat he swung over the stern, followed by Maxwell, and before the sleepy helmsman realized what was going on, he was bound and gagged.

"Now come on," whispered Reuben Thomas; the three midshipmen climbed aboard, and going forward, the other man was easily and quickly secured.

"What about those fellows in the boat?" asked Spence.

"Oh, cut the line and let them go," replied Laurie, carelessly; "if they make a row, it will be all the worse for them."

"You take it pretty cool," laughed Decatur. "Do you know that there are twelve men in that boat?"

"Well, aren't we six and in possession? Cut the rope!"

This was done, and the sudden relaxation of tension on the rope almost overturned the towing boat.

Thinking the line had parted, the men in the boat called to their comrades, and receiving no reply, pulled to the side, but the first man who attempted to come aboard was knocked back by a stunning blow from Maxwell's fist.

Alarmed at this, the others pulled away until their comrade had recovered sufficiently to tell them that the gunboat was taken, for, at Decatur's suggestion, he had been allowed to come up far enough to see that there were a number of strangers aboard.

The boat's crew was unarmed, and naturally reasoned that those on board the gunboat would blow them out of the water if they attempted to board her, so they pulled away for the shore. The long brass 18-pounder forward, and the two howitzers abaft were too much for them.

"Well, I suppose we may as well go back," suggested Spence.

"Oh, hang it—no! There's been neither fun, nor fighting—let's go ahead!" exclaimed Decatur.

"Right you are, Steve!" assented Laurie, and that settled it.

"We'll have a cruise of it," said Laurie, and, having the sanction of three officers, the men did not object, so, a light breeze springing up at dawn, the gunboat was kept inshore.

When daylight came the Seraph—the gunboat—was within five miles of the coast of Algiers, and then Spence, who, as usual, was first to use his eyes, discovered two gunboats bearing out toward them.

"I guess what d'ye call it's the best part of valor!" said Hawkins. "These fellows have made good time in going for help 't get their boat back."

"Yes, but as the wind is dying out completely, I don't see what discretion is left us. We must fight if it's five to one—as I suppose it must be."

"We'll be very lucky, Mr. Lawrence, if it ain't eight or ten to one," said Hawkins.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIGHT AND A "FIX."

"—Front to front,

Bring thou this fiend—
Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,
Heaven forgive him too!"

MACBETH.

"WHY not loosen these fellows, Mr. Decatur?" asked Gentleman George, indicating the prisoners. "Hawkins can ascertain from them if that boat's crew are aboard those two gunboats."

"What's the difference?"

"Well, if they don't know we've got her, they will not suspect us until they are pretty close, and we'll have the advantage of the surprise."

"If they do know we are here, Laurie and Hawkins can begin firing as soon as they are in range."

"Gad, you're right!" exclaimed Decatur. "Hawkins, see if you can find out if those fellows we drove off are aboard either of those gunboats. Release one of the prisoners and give him a glass."

The ex-slave, who had heard and approved of Spence's suggestion, obeyed, and a minute after the glass was fixed on the slowly-approaching boats, said:

"They're there, sir, you can rely upon it. Look at this fellow shaking—half-joy an' half-fear."

"Very well, Hawkins. Just tie him up to keep him out of trouble, and you and I will take turns at keeping those fellows off. If we disable one, we'll take the other," said Laurie very coolly.

"By Jove, you're developing rapidly, Laurie!" exclaimed Decatur, while the other stared.

"Take in the canvas," said Laurie, without paying any attention to either words or looks; "there's not a breath of air, and we might as well give them only spars to fire at."

Every one realized the truth of this, and in a few minutes the Seraph was drifting under bare poles toward the gunboats, which came on slowly until within a half-mile without any sign of hostility.

"They evidently expect to surprise us," remarked Decatur.

"Well, it's time we undeceived them," said Laurie. "Suppose you try the first shot, Hawkins."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the gunner, as he went forward and sighted the long brass 18-pounder.

There was a puff of white smoke, the dull boom of the gun, and the nearest gunboat lost headway entirely, owing to the loss of her foremast.

"Well done!" was the general cry, and then Laurie stepped forward to try his skill.

The middy's shot was equally successful—accidentally—for it dismounted the shining brass gun in the bow of the other gunboat, besides knocking over several of her crew.

"It's getting interesting," remarked Decatur.

"It will be in a little while. They'll be out in the boats directly," said Hawkins.

"So much the worse for them. Don't wait for them—keep pegging away."

Hawkins obeyed until a boat was lowered from each of the gunboats, and just as this was done the other brass gun was knocked over.

"Now bring her round as much as possible. We will meet them with the howitzers," said Decatur, and the anchor being dropped, the Seraph swung stern first to the approaching boats.

On they came, one slightly in advance, both carrying boat howitzers and crowded with men, until the foremost boat was within two cables' length. By that time Laurie and Hawkins had managed to get the long gun swung round and trained on it.

"Now's your chance!" cried Laurie.

Boom! went the big gun, and a moment after what was left of the boat's crew were struggling in the water. After plunging through the boat the shot had carried away her stern.

Meantime the other boat was drawing closer, and its gun began to talk, which called attention to it.

"See if you can stop that," directed Decatur, as a shot whistled across the deck, and Laurie and Hawkins opened fire with the howitzers.

The boat was advancing rapidly, and was not an easy mark. Two shots from each gun had gone wild, and it was within a half cable's length when a shot from Hawkins's gun caught her solidly on the bow, smashing it, dismounting the gun placed there, and killing the gunner.

This stayed the boat until Laurie sent a shot right among the crew, and before they could get out of range, Hawkins fired again, killing and wounding several more.

By this time a small boat from each of the gunboats had pulled out to the assistance of the survivors of the first boat, and now came to help those in the second.

Hawkins, whose hatred of his former masters was inveterate, was about to fire on this boat, but Laurie would not allow it.

"Let them go," he said, "it'll be a miracle if they keep afloat long enough to get on board."

"Well, let's put those gunboats out of condition to follow us when the wind springs up," suggested Decatur.

The sea was perfectly quiet, there was not a breath of air stirring, and this enabled the survivors of the two boats' crews to reach their vessels, but it also made those vessels splendid targets for Hawkins, and when the Algerians reached them, the gunboats were little better than wrecks.

Realizing that further delay meant final destruction, the Algerians began towing for the shore.

"Bit off more'n they could chew," laughed Maxwell on seeing this, but Laurie was not through yet.

"Yes," he said, "but we must not let them get away. We can get out and tow, while Hawkins keeps pegging away at them."

"Oh, be satisfied with what you've got!" exclaimed Spence, adding: "You've been having all the fun, and now you want us to do the hard work."

But Laurie would not be satisfied, and the boat was lowered and towing begun by Decatur and the three seamen, while Laurie and Spence kept up a steady fire on the retreating gunboats until within three miles of the shore, when another gunboat appeared on the scene.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Laurie, after examining her through his glass, "she's being towed by two long-boats, manned by fully fifty men."

This was communicated to Decatur, and the cutter swung round and headed out to sea again, but their progress was slow and the gunboat gained rapidly. Worse still, nothing but the howitzers could be brought to bear on it, and these, as yet, were ineffective.

"They'll get tired of towin', and come for us in the long-boats pretty soon," prophesied Hawkins, and the words were scarcely uttered when Spence announced that this had been done.

"Come aboard—we must face the music," said Laurie.

And now a fresh danger presented itself. The balance of the crews of the other gunboats had joined their friends—making four boats in all, but only two guns to fight them with!

"Looks ez if we'd get enough fightin' anyhow," remarked Reuben Thomas, dryly, adding: "though, there don't 'pear t' be much fun in it, t' my idee."

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE FIGHT—RESCUED.

But, for the miracle,
I mean our preservation, few in millions
Can speak like us.

TEMPEST.

"It strikes me that we're very much in the position of the man who went tiger-hunting," observed Decatur, as he watched the rapidly approaching boats. "It was great sport, until the tiger took a notion to hunt the man."

"Better load all the muskets, while Hawkins and I attend to the howitzers," suggested Laurie; "they'll be alongside before you get through preaching."

"All right!" laughed Decatur; "bring up your muskets. If there's a rifle among the arms, let me have it; I used to be a pretty fair shot."

There were two rifles—long-barreled, with fancifully-carved stocks—and Decatur and James began using them at once.

The leading boat was about three hundred yards distant, and when both fired, two of the long sweeps stopped.

"Each fetched his man," declared Spence, who was now busy loading muskets.

"Yes, and their fire, too," rejoined Decatur, as he saw a man at the howitzer in the bow of the boat.

"Let's fire at him," suggested James, and before the man could pull the lanyard, the rifles rung out again.

"Good!" cried Decatur, as the man fell back, and then directed the gunners to give their attention to the other long-boat.

"We'll keep these fellows in play for a while," he determined, "and then, when it comes to the last, they'll have some work before they get aboard."

Again and again the Algerians tried to fire the howitzer, but each time the two riflemen either killed or wounded the gunner; whereupon the boat was got under way for the "Seraph," forging ahead steadily, notwithstanding the rapid fire poured at it by Decatur, James and Maxwell.

Meantime Laurie and Hawkins were at work with the guns, and managed to destroy one of the smaller boats, which had got in advance of the long boat.

"Now, let's keep at the other fellow," urged Laurie, as they plumped two shots into the small boat, sinking it.

Both were expert gunners, but the boat, as it bounded over the waves, urged by a dozen long sweeps, presented a difficult mark, and it was within a hundred yards before they managed to hit it.

At this juncture the other long boat started, after vainly attempting to fire its howitzer, and the situation was growing desperate, when Laurie struck that boat fairly across the bow.

The solid shot went straight from stem to stern, knocking the crew right and left, and, of course, bringing the boat to a standstill.

"Now, fire at the other, quick!" cried Laurie. Hawkins, who had reserved his fire, obeyed just in time, catching the other at about fifty yards, and striking it amidships.

"Hurrah! We'll beat them yet!" shouted Decatur, gleefully. "Quick, now, and steady!"

As fast as they could be loaded, the guns and muskets were emptied at the long-boats, until they began to draw off, and the little crew of the Seraph were growing exultant when Spence called attention to a number of boats—galleys, long-boats, cutters and small sail-boats—fully a dozen, and containing in all over two hundred men, coming out from the shore.

"Good heavens! We've stirred up a regular hornets' nest!" cried Decatur, after examining them through his glass.

"There's a ripple off-shore—see!" exclaimed Maxwell, whose attention had been attracted by the small sail-boats in the approaching flotilla.

"Up with the canvas!" commanded Laurie, himself springing to assist.

Faint indeed was the breeze, but it was their only hope of escape from certain capture or death, and every sail was set and trimmed to catch the wind.

Gradually the sails filled, but the wind was so light that the Seraph barely gained headway, and the Algerians came up hand over hand, until at length the leading boats were within three cables' length.

Two of these, carrying heavy carronades, began firing at this distance, and the shots came whistling through sails and rigging, while Laurie and Hawkins replied with the howitzers, doing no little execution, but the flotilla still came on, with overpowering strength.

"I hope you'll forgive me, gentlemen, for bringing you into this," said Laurie, turning to the others.

The leading boats were within a half-cable's length; it seemed to be their last chance to exchange words, and there was a suspicious moisture in the speaker's eye—he felt that he had led his friends to their death.

"Stop that, Laurie! Attend to your gun! We're not dead—yet!" exclaimed Decatur, with a reckless laugh, but, as he extended his hand, all understood it was a silent farewell, and each shook hands with the other!

"Now, boys, back to your work!" ordered Decatur. "We'll make it a dear victory, yet!"

The two leading boats were within fifty yards. It was *do—and die*, and both Laurie and Hawkins pointed their guns as deliberately as if practicing at a target.

Both shots took effect, and both crews came to a standstill for a minute or more, to right their boat and get rid of the dead.

Decatur, Maxwell and James continued their fire, while Spence kept loading, but it was simply desperation—the case was hopeless.

Suddenly there came the dull boom of a heavy gun, and one of the leading boats was knocked into splinters!

"Hurrah! Here comes the frigate!" called out Spence.

So engaged were all that none had noticed the approach of the Enterprise. She was being towed by several boats, and using her bow chaser, but now the wind freshened, and both the Enterprise and the Seraph were able to use their sails, and, swinging round, the latter brought the long 18 to bear on the nearest boat, blowing it out of the water.

"Now, Laurie! You look after the guns—I'll do the rest! Maxwell! James! Look to the sails!" cried Decatur, springing to the wheel.

Within five minutes every boat was out of reach or sunk; then the Seraph bore up to the Enterprise.

Decatur, because of his seniority, was on board first.

"Well, sir, what excuse have you for this?" sternly demanded Captain Sterrett.

"None, sir."

"Very well; you are all under arrest. As for you," to the seamen, "I shall put you in irons."

CHAPTER X.

CENSURED—PROMOTED—CHALLENGED.

"Now let it work: Mischief thou art afoot,
Take then what course thou wilt!"
SHAKESPEARE.

"HAVE you, sir, any excuse to offer?" asked the captain, as Laurie approached, and saluted.

"No, sir, nothing for myself, except the gunboat and what we sunk, but whatever punishment there is, I alone should receive it. I coaxed the others to help me."

"That may be all true, sir, but 'twas I pointed out the gunboat!" interposed Spence, from behind Laurie.

"Oh! Indeed! Well, suppose you come to the cabin and tell me all about it," said the captain, scarcely able to repress a smile, adding:

"Here, Mr. Decatur! Come, Mr. Dare!"

"Now proceed with your story," said the captain, on reaching the cabin, and, as gravely as if on trial for his life, Laurie related everything that had taken place since leaving the Enterprise.

"And I forgot to tell you," he said, in conclusion, addressing his comrades, and not the captain, "that when I went below, just before the first attack, I found a box of gold coin." Then to the captain:

"It's all kinds—French, Spanish, English and American—but it'll make about ten thousand dollars of our money."

Everybody stared in surprise, but Laurie noticed nothing. He was staring straight ahead—thinking that, perhaps, it would have been better, after all, if they had died fighting the pirates. But it was too late now; they would be disgraced, and it was all his fault.

The captain noticed his attitude and guessed what was passing through the lad's mind.

"Suppose we had left you to your fate?" he asked; "what would you have done?"

"Oh, we would have been killed, of course," replied Laurie, adding and using almost the same words that he uttered years after and which were graven on history's page:

"But we wouldn't give up the ship!"

The captain and lieutenant exchanged glances, and the former said:

"I don't know what to do with you. According to the rules of the service, you should be court-martialed; but three men and three boys that capture one gunboat and destroy at least two others, against odds running from five to forty to one—Mr. Dare, what d'ye recommend?"

"You might give each an acting order as lieutenant," was the smiling reply.

"Yes, that might be done," assented the captain gravely, adding:

"Pass the word for the other three."

This was done. Hawkins, James and Maxwell quickly appeared and stood looking rather blue while waiting to hear what was wanted.

"Now, sirs," began the captain, severely, "your conduct in leaving the ship and delaying it was abominable, and must be publicly censured; but your subsequent daring and determined bravery I can commend—privately. So your punishment shall be simply a public censure—your reward must follow—not precede it."

"You, Mr. Decatur, and you, Mr. Lawrence, I shall make acting lieutenants to abide the decision of the powers that be. Your age and inexperience prevents my doing the same for you, Mr. Spence—at present."

"You (with a gesture comprehending the others), I cannot do anything for now, but I shall watch for the first opportunity."

"Now go on the quarter-deck and listen to your punishment."

Like men in a dream the six men went on deck—they could scarcely realize what had happened.

As soon as they were on deck the captain and first lieutenant appeared—both looking very grave, and the hands were turned up to divisions.

Then the men looked sympathetically at the six culprits, while the captain read them a severe lecture on the enormity of their offense, winding up the statement that nothing but their gallant behavior during the engagement with the Algerians, and their still more gallant fight during the morning, kept him from treating them as deserters.

Then, as he turned to go below, the captain incidentally announced that Decatur and Laurie were acting lieutenants, and the men, who were dismissed with this, gave three rousing cheers.

There is very little secrecy aboard ship, and, ten minutes after the men were dismissed, every one knew what had happened in the cabin—and,

with the exception of three, rejoiced at the outcome.

Midshipman Harper, Gorman, the master, and Williams, the steward, all three felt sorely aggrieved at the mock punishment and real reward received by the three midshipmen and their companions.

Lieutenant Dare was placed in command of the prize-crew on the *Algiers*, and the master, with Decatur and Morgan, the gunner's mate, took charge of the *Seraph*, and the order being given, the vessels set sail for Tripoli.

Morgan, the gunner's mate, was a stout, dumpy man, with a red face, red hands, red hair and red whiskers, and he had read a great deal of one book. Every spare moment he had, was devoted to the "Art of Gunnery," but, although he studied much he understood little, and Laurie, who had studied the same book with more understanding, extracted a great deal of amusement out of him.

The gunner's mate had once studied navigation, and the midshipman had but to get him excited, to cause Mr. Morgan to get horribly mixed in his technical terms; he would mix them all up together; for disparts, sines and cosines, parabolas, tangents, quadrature and Gunter's scale, projectiles and traverse sailing, were all crowded into a brain which had no capacity enough for the rule of three.

But Mr. Morgan expected to be master-gunner some day—perhaps master, and then he would have the advantage of knowing both arts.

After getting Mr. Morgan mixed up, Laurie would set him right, and, if he disputed it, appeal to Hawkins, who invariably confirmed what the midshipman said, which did not make the gunner feel any the better disposed toward his opponent.

It was this teasing of Laurie's that caused the gunner to consent to act as second in a peculiar duel, which was to be fought at the first opportunity.

On the third day after the capture of the *Algiers*, Decatur walked forward to speak to the master, who was talking to Williams, the steward. Captain Sterrett did not like the latter, and had sent him aboard the gunboat "to be with his friend, Mr. Gorman," appointing the assistant-steward in his place on the *Enterprise*, which angered the steward very much, and, as usual, he blamed the midshipman—especially Spence, who discovered the *Seraph*.

Decatur's business was of no particular importance, and he stood leaning on the rail, just out of earshot, waiting for them to get through, but as soon as Williams became aware of the lieutenant's presence, he raised his voice, and, as if continuing the conversation said:

"I musht agree wud ye, Misther Gorman—it is quare that whippersnappers of b'ys are passed over the heads uv foine min."

(Mr. Williams was an Irishman, but by no means a credit to his native country, for, while the courage of the average Irishman is unquestioned, there was considerable doubt of Mr. Williams's.)

"Yes, it's rough," returned Gorman, "and them associatin' with common sailors, not 't speak of makin' friends of ex-slaves 'n' pirates."

"Faith, it's nothin' but the money uv that young rip, Spence, that does it. Shure ye—"

Decatur could stand no more—they were making him a listener, and striding forward he stopped Williams with:

"You confounded ignoramus, if you impose any further on my being an officer, I'll knock you down! What d'ye mean by such talk of my friends and myself?"

Williams shrunk back, but Gorman took it up.

"Listeners never hear anythin' pleasant," he said.

"Listeners!" scornfully echoed Decatur. "You are worse than he is—protecting yourself under the fore-castle, when, if on the quarter-deck, you would have to answer for that one word—if nothing else!"

There was no question about Gorman's courage, but he said:

"It appears to me that your quarrel lies with my friend. It's a nice way to put it—hidin' under the fore-castle, but ain't you protectin' yourself under cover of the quarter-deck?"

"Be jabers, ye'r' right he is, Misther Gorman!" put in Williams. "Phin I insult a gentleman, I ginerally give him satisfaction."

This was too much for Decatur's fiery temper.

"Very good!" he exclaimed, "I'll give you gentlemen all the satisfaction you wish as soon as we get to Malta—we will be sent there to refit."

"One at a time?" asked Gorman.

"No, sir! Both at the same time, if I live or not at all! Now choose your second—mine is—is Mr. Laurie," replied Decatur.

He could think of no one else whom he could trust.

And so the duel was arranged, and the master could think of no one better than Morgan to act as his second and Williams's.

Morgan had no feeling against Decatur, nor really any against Laurie, but, on the spur of the moment, consented to act because Decatur was one of the "three inseparables."

Three days later the commodore welcomed the *Enterprise* and its two prizes at Malta—the latter being very welcome additions to his small fleet, and on hearing the story of the capture and defense of the *Seraph*, confirmed the acting orders, making the midshipmen full-fledged lieutenants.

Both the *Algiers* and *Enterprise* needed repairs, and the squadron proceeded, leaving them to follow with the gunboat. The day after, Laurie and Morgan met and arranged that the duel should take place next morning—and an odd arrangement it was.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ODD DUEL.

"SIR TOBY: 'Excellent! I smell a dev'el!'"

TWELFTH NIGHT.

"WHEN Laurie and Spence were informed of the proposed duel, both were rather put out over the idea of Decatur putting himself on a level with his opponents by consenting to meet them as gentlemen.

It was done, however, and there was nothing now to do but go ahead, and Laurie waited on Morgan, who received him in a very friendly fashion, and the next morning—which was Sunday—was fixed upon for the meeting.

"For ye see," said Morgan, "they can't refuse t' let ez go ashore on account o' work on the ship."

According to agreement, leave to go ashore was asked and granted to all interested, except Spence.

"No, I would rather you spent the day with me," said the captain, to the latter. "I am going to call on the governor, and you will find it very pleasant."

The midshipman could offer no objection, and on leaving the cabin sought Laurie, to whom he said:

"It's no go. The old man dines with the governor, and I'm to go with him. Now, there's no telling what may happen to-morrow morning—you know I've got plenty of money, so you had better take this."

"This" was a heavy purse of gold, and, after a moment's hesitation, Laurie accepted it, saying:

"My share of the prize-money will make up as much as this. I'll give you an order for it."

Next morning after breakfast, the three principals and their seconds met at a little inn ashore, where Laurie was surprised to find Hawkins in conversation with an Arab.

Hawkins had come ashore to make purchases the previous night, with liberty to remain over Sunday, and, meeting a former resident of Tripoli and one who was a good friend to him when he was a slave there, had spent the night at the inn.

As both Laurie and Decatur and his friend Ben Ali spoke French, Hawkins introduced them, but the first-named was called away immediately after by Morgan to make arrangements for the duel.

Seating himself at a little table away from the others, Morgan began:

"Mr. Laurie, I've had no experience on the field myself, and I must confess this puzzled me for awhile, but I've got it all right now. You know what an equilateral triangle is?"

"One having three equal sides," replied Laurie; "but what the deuce has that to do with the duel?"

"Everything—it solved the puzzle. Indeed, the duel can only take place upon this principle. See here!"

The gunner took from his pocket a card upon which was drawn a triangle, and at each corner the initial of one of the parties.

"You see," he continued, "we have three parties, and as each must have the same chance, and each a shot, this is the only fair way it could be done. Now, for instance, there stands Mr. Decatur, the master here, and the steward at the other corner, so if the distance is fairly measured, everything is even."

"By Jove, Mr. Morgan, you've got a great head!" exclaimed Laurie, who could hardly keep a straight face, "but how do they are?"

"Oh, I flatter myself I've solved the puzzle," replied Morgan, complacently. "How they fire is not of much consequence, but if you like we can arrange it according to this card; that is, Mr. Decatur fires at Mr. Gorman, Mr. Gorman at Mr. Williams, and Mr. Williams at Mr. Decatur! What d'ye think of it?"

"Magnificent!" cried Laurie, and to avoid laughing in Morgan's face, he arose and went over to his friend.

"Come outside!" he gasped, dragging Decatur from the table, and then, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, told him of Morgan's plan.

"It's a beautiful idea—for me," said Decatur, laughing heartily, "but I'm afraid his principals will insist on two duels."

But they did not. The master had been in hot water all morning—the captain, Dare and Porter seeming to have conspired to make his life miserable by complaining about various trivial matters which at other times passed unnoticed—so that when Morgan laid the triangle before him and explained its meaning, he was too angry to pay any attention.

"Oh, never mind! If it's shot for shot, it's all right," he said, moodily, and then they repaired to a secluded spot, where Laurie gravely measured off a triangle, after which Morgan went over the ground, and having proved its correctness, announced that everything was in readiness.

"So, you will please place Mr. Decatur as we arranged," continued Morgan, putting the master in his position, and then taking the steward's arm, led him to the third corner.

"What does this m'ane?" asked the steward, as Morgan handed him a pistol. "Doesn't Mither Gorman fight Mither Decatur first—or do the two uv us fire at him at wanst?"

"Don't be a fool—if you can help it!" exclaimed Morgan, testily. "Now listen: Mr. Decatur fires at Mr. Gorman, Mr. Gorman fires at you—"

"Mither Gorman fires at me!" burst in Williams. "An' phat the devil w'd he fire at me for? Sure it's t'other man ye m'ane."

"Confound you! Can't you listen? It's not the other man I mean—it's you! Now try to keep your mouth shut, and I'll explain."

"Mr. Decatur fires at Mr. Gorman, Mr. Gorman fires at you, and—"

"Aw—be off wud ye! Sure it's crazy ye are!" interrupted the steward again.

"Look here, Williams! If you interrupt me once more, I'll fight you myself!" threatened Morgan.

"Ye'r' all mad," muttered the steward, and his second began again:

"Mr. Decatur fires at Mr. Gorman, he fires at you, and you fire at Mr. Decatur. Now do you understand it?"

"Sure I'll be dead be that time."

"No—confound it! You all fire at once."

"But what does Mr. Gorman shoot me for? I'm his fri'nd!" expostulated Williams.

"The fellow's afraid. He deserves to be kicked back to the ship!" said Laurie, fearing the triangle would be spoiled.

"I'm not, but I don't see why me fri'nd should shoot me," retorted Williams.

"Because it's a duel of three," said Morgan. "You're in my hands and you must do as I say. Come, get ready!"

"It's the victim of a madman I am!" said the steward, as his second stepped back to give the signal.

He had confidently expected that Gorman and Decatur would fight first, and disable each other.

Raising his pistol with trembling hand, he shut his eyes and at the word "Fire!" pulled the trigger, but, as it was not cocked, it did not, of course, go off.

The steward did not have time to discover this, because a bullet from the master's pistol scorched across the seat of his trousers, and he fell howling that he was killed.

Decatur was, of course, unharmed, but the master had an ugly wound in the right arm.

"I'm kilt! Ye've murdered me, ye mad devil ye!" roared the steward, as he rolled and kicked about in what he imagined to be his dying agonies.

"Shut up, you idiot!" said Morgan, who was examining the wound. "Why, you're not hurt at all. Get up!"

But the steward refused to get up, and implored the others to "take away that madman."

"Come, Steve, let's get away," said Laurie, who saw a number of people approaching, and the last they saw of the others, was Morgan thumping Williams for calling him a madman,

while Gorman stood by cursing him for not getting up.

"Let's make an excuse of this—pretend we're frightened, and go off somewhere until the ships are refitted," suggested Laurie, and Decatur agreed.

Going back to the inn they found that Hawkins had returned to the ship, but the presence of his friend suggested an idea to Laurie.

"I've plenty of money," he said. "Let us hire a small sail-boat and get this fellow to go over to Tripoli with us. He can fix us up so that it will be safe enough."

"All right! Send a note to Dare saying we're afraid to come back until this affair blows over—that we suppose Williams is dead."

CHAPTER XII.

IN ALGIERS—THE SLAVE.

"—The good old plan,
That they should get, who have the power,
And they should keep, who can."

WORDSWORTH.

As Laurie said, he had plenty of money, and, armed thus, there are few difficulties that cannot be overcome. To persuade the Arab to accompany them to Tripoli did not prove an arduous task, and after changing their clothes, and darkening the color of their skin, Ben Ali declared they would pass muster.

"Now for a boat," said Decatur.

"And plenty of good provisions," added Laurie, handing the Arab a doubloon, with instructions to engage a boat and stock it, but as Ben Ali had a boat of his own, it was only necessary to inform him what particular creature comforts were most desired, and he left them.

"Do you think we can trust him?" asked Decatur.

"With that money? Oh, yes—he'll make more by being honest."

"I don't mean that particularly. I didn't like the way he looked when you showed the purse."

Laurie's reply was interrupted by the sight of a crowd passing the inn, and hastening to the window, they saw Williams being carried by a half-dozen men. On either side of him walked Gorman and Morgan, while a howling mob surrounded all three.

"That fellow must believe he's badly wounded," said Laurie, laughing at the memory of the scene of the duel.

"Oh, hang him! Order a good dinner—I'm as hungry as a bear."

"And just about as polite," laughed Laurie, as he dodged a blow, and went to order the dinner.

After dinner, a letter giving all the particulars of the duel was written to Lieutenant Dare, concluding with a request that the captain get them off at something short of hanging.

"There! If we never come back, we've given them something to laugh over and remember us by," said Decatur, handing Laurie the letter to add his signature, after which it was intrusted to the landlord to be delivered next morning.

That evening, as Spence was leaning over the side of the *Enterprise*, a *speronare* passed within a short distance, and one of its five occupants waved his hand, but it was not until the boat was out of the harbor that it occurred to the midshipman that Decatur and Laurie formed part of its crew or cargo.

"Hang Decatur and Laurie!" exclaimed Captain Sterrett, when the first lieutenant came to him next morning with the penitent letter, but after reading it, he burst out laughing at the description of the duel.

"A truly remarkable affair!" he commented.

"But we must put a stop to this Tripoli trip, if possible, Mr. Dare. Find out whether they have got off the island. It's an insanely dangerous trip—and they could have been let off with a sharp reprimand, for, after all, there's no great damage done."

But they were gone, having already put in the first night aboard the *speronare*, keeping watch and watch, owing to Decatur's suspicions of Ben Ali, but the latter did nothing to justify these suspicions up to the time they ran into the harbor at Tripoli.

They had arranged so as to arrive after sunset, and it was dark when the anchor was dropped at a quiet spot below the city proper.

"Are you going to any particular house?" asked Decatur, when they landed.

"My sister's—come!" replied Ben Ali, and the two lieutenants followed him along a narrow, dusty road, which was very lonely until they neared the city, when it began to swarm with Arabs, Turks and Moors, and many who only looked like them.

"We are nearly there," said Ben Ali, as they passed a massive building facing on the sea.

"That's where father and I escaped from," remarked Laurie to Decatur.

"Don't talk so loud—there are many here who speak English," warned Ben Ali.

"Phew! I should say there was," said Laurie, for Decatur and he had exchanged many remarks regarding the Arab's trustworthiness, in his presence, without suspecting he understood English.

Decatur said nothing, but he was thinking a great deal of the Arab's pretended ignorance of English, and the many inquiries he had made regarding the wealth of his own and Laurie's parents.

"It's suspicious," thought Decatur.

Shortly after this, Ben Ali stopped at the door of a tall, narrow building and rapped for admission, which was not granted until after the party had been inspected through a hole in the door.

"Most infernally suspicious!" was Decatur's mental comment.

Ben Ali received a warm welcome from the hard-featured woman who admitted the party, and whom he introduced as his sister.

No one else was visible, but the Arab warned his companions against expressing or showing any interest or curiosity as to anything they might see or hear in the house, after which he left them for a few minutes "to tell his sister who and what they were." When he returned, he was accompanied by a Moorish girl, bearing a tray containing a substantial meal, to which all three did ample justice and then, being tired out, Decatur suggested that they should retire.

Ben Ali seemed pleased to hear this, and conducted them to a large room on the second floor where, notwithstanding their suspicions, both retired to rest and were soon sound asleep.

Next morning at breakfast the two lieutenants were introduced to Ben Ali's brother-in-law, Abdel Raza, "a most villainous-looking fellow," according to Laurie.

After breakfast, Ben Ali took them through the city and along the coast, pointing out and explaining the strength of Fort English, as the Bashaw's castle was called, and the Crown, Mole and other batteries. He was alarmingly communicative.

"For," thought Decatur, "the fellow knows we're Americans, and that this information will be of the greatest value when we get back—if ever we do."

On the evening of the second day of their visit Ben Ali opened the door for them, and then went off, saying he had some business to attend to, so they must amuse themselves as best they could for he would not be back that night.

The day was warm; they had had a long walk and both were tired, so instead of entering the room on the ground floor, as was usual, Laurie and Decatur quietly ascended to their own room on the second floor.

Just as they were about to enter the room, both heard the voice of Abdel Raza on the floor above followed by the bitter sobbing of a woman.

"Well, you have your choice," the Arab was saying; "either go to the harem of Osman Ali, as I wish, or I will sell you in the public market."

"I will not! I will not!" sobbed the woman.

"Very well. If you are of the same mind to-morrow night, I will bring some buyers to look at you, and next day you will be sold."

"Oh, let me go home!" entreated the captive.

"My mother will pay you well."

"Your mother!" said the Arab, contemptuously. "What know I of your mother? France is far away—she might be dead before I reached there."

With the last word the door above was closed, and Laurie and Decatur retreated into their room barely in time to avoid the Arab.

"What d'ye think of it, Steve?" asked Laurie, when they heard the street door close on Abdel.

"Think! I think our visit to Tripoli will end about twelve to-night," replied Decatur.

"Then you intend to rescue her from that brute?"

"Of course. I wish we could warn her that we are coming up for her to-night," replied Decatur.

"Yes—she may raise a row," assented Laurie.

And then, after a moment's thought, he opened the door and began whistling a French air.

After a minute's pause, during which a door was heard opening above, Laurie repeated the air, and when he paused again a faint voice was heard asking:

"Who are you? Do you speak French?"
 "Yes," replied Laurie, in a low tone, and stepping to the foot of the stairs, saw a figure clad in white standing above.
 Here Decatur joined him and took up the conversation.

"You were crying a little while ago?" he asked.

"Ye-es," was the hesitating reply, and understanding the cause, he ascended a few steps, and said:

"Never mind our appearance. We are American officers, and have a boat near here. To-night, at twelve o'clock, we will come for you—is your door locked?"

"No, but the front—the street door is."

"Well, we'll manage that—"

"Hush! Somebody's coming in!" interrupted Laurie, and, with a warning gesture to the figure, dragged Decatur back into their room.

By the heavy footfall they guessed it was the Arab returning, and, although he did not come up, further conversation with the captive would be dangerous, so they contented themselves with talking of her.

"By George! How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Decatur.

"I didn't get a chance to see," said Laurie dryly.

"Well, she is—and not over sixteen, either."

"I didn't say she was ugly, and I don't care if she's sixty," retorted Laurie. "The thing is, how are we to get her away? You may rely on it, if she's such a prize, it won't be easy work."

"You're right, Laurie, we must think about that street door, for one thing. Suppose we go down to supper—we can take a look at it on the way."

"No, we'll go without supper to-night," said Laurie. "I don't think they know we have returned, and that will be in our favor."

Decatur agreed to the truth of this, and they sat planning and talking until nearly midnight, and then it occurred to them that there were three rooms on the floor above, but which was occupied by the captive they did not know.

"It must be at the top of the stairs, or she would not have heard me so quick," said Laurie.

"That sounds reasonable—but you know it's only an hour since we heard that fellow go up. However, let's go ahead—it's time, now. Look to your knife—no pistols."

With the last words, Decatur left the room, followed by Laurie, and cautiously began ascending the stairs.

When half-way up a door creaked above, and a key rattled in the lock of the street door. A muttered curse had followed the opening of the door above, and Decatur whispered:

"Laurie, old boy, we're trapped! Ben Ali is coming up—hear him bolt and chain the door! and the other is coming down. Do your best!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ESCAPE—ORDERED TO DEATH.

—"Take him hence!"

The whole world shall not save him."

CYMBELINE.

"COME back! Down to the room, quick!" hissed Laurie. "Ben Ali sleeps below; he won't come up."

He was pulling Decatur as he spoke, and they managed, by crouching against the wall in the narrow hallway, to escape the sleepy Abdel Raza, who almost touched them as he passed a moment after, dressed for the start.

They heard him unfastening the door, and then it was opened and closed as he passed out.

"Now's our time—the door is unfastened!" exclaimed Laurie. "Go you go up, and I'll keep guard here."

Before Decatur could reply, there came the sound from above of a door being opened, and then the dim figure of a woman could be distinguished at the top of the stairs.

It might be Abdel Raza's wife, but there was no time for hesitation, and Decatur called to her in a low tone to "come down," which she did at once.

"Hush! We must get out first and talk after," said Decatur, as the captive began to thank him, and stealing down with the utmost caution, they reached the lower hall without accident.

They were congratulating themselves on this, and were moving cautiously toward the door, when Laurie stumbled over a mat, coming down with a crash on the bare floor.

Ben Ali slept in the large room just off the entrance, and Decatur sprang forward to await him. A full minute elapsed before the Arab opened his door and stepped into the hallway,

and then down came the butt of Decatur's pistol on his bare skull.

The lieutenant caught him as he fell, thus preventing another crash, and then with Laurie's assistance carried him into the room.

"Hadn't we better bind him?" suggested Laurie, and Decatur deciding that the advantage of the start they would gain by doing so more than counterbalanced the risk of Abdel's return, Ben Ali was bound and gagged.

Luckily the girl had followed them into the room, for while her rescuers were engaged with Ben Ali, she caught the sound of fumbling at the outer door-knob.

"Abdel!" she said, and quickly and quietly closed and locked the door.

Abdel it was, and more than half drunk. He stopped at the door, kicked it several times, but getting no answer, cursed his brother-in-law, and staggered up-stairs.

"Out now, quick!" exclaimed Decatur, and exercising every care to avoid observation, they took the road to the point where the *speronare* was lying.

"We shall have to swim to the boat, and if possible surprise those two fellows," said Decatur, after they were outside the city.

"Yes, I suppose so—if we don't, they're Maltese and will be glad of the chance to get home, and at the same time earn the money Ben Ali would have received."

Laurie said this confidently enough, but he had an ugly suspicion that the Maltese sailors had already gone home, and further that the *speronare* would not be found where it was left. Even if Ben Ali meant to act fair by them, he would not be apt to keep his boat lying idle for a week.

So reasoned Laurie, and his reasoning was proved only too correct when they reached the little cove where they had disembarked. There was no boat of any kind in sight.

"Good heavens!" cried Decatur. "Can we have come to the wrong place? But no—I remember it distinctly."

"It's the place sure enough," said Laurie quickly, "and now, what's the next move? Our escape may be discovered at any moment, especially as Abdel's drunk, and may desire company."

"I hardly know. A boat we must get, so we had better tramp along the shore. If we find one, we'll try to hire it—if we can't, we must seize it."

Up and down they tramped until daylight found them some ten miles from the city, but still without a boat, and soon the situation would be decidedly dangerous.

Alone, they might escape unnoticed, but with the girl, there was not the slightest hope that they could do so. Abdel and Ben Ali would be certain to pursue—had probably started already—and every passer-by would be able to inform him of their whereabouts.

"It's a poor service we have rendered you, Eugenie," said Decatur (he had already learned part of her story, as well as her name). "It looks as though all our trouble must end in recapture."

"Oh, I would die rather than go back!" cried the girl, clasping her hands.

"Well, you can rest assured some one will die before they take you," replied Decatur, with a grim smile.

Meantime Laurie, as usual, was doing the thinking for the party. He now turned to Decatur, saying:

"Steve, we've got just one chance and that is to divide. You and Miss Whatever-her-name-is must go up among the hills, and when you find a safe hiding-place for her you can easily procure food."

"I will stay along the shore and try to hire a boat. We can meet her again to-night—you and I, I mean, for it may be impossible to get a boat."

"That's a good idea, Laurie. Even if we are noticed they will not think we are the ones wanted, for there will be only two instead of three. But look out for yourself, my boy, for they'll describe us pretty closely."

"Don't fret about me," replied Laurie.

So saying they shook hands, and now "the three inseparables" were separated.

Laurie watched his late companions until they disappeared among the hills, and then he made ready to meet Abdel and Ben Ali. First, he tore his neat-looking clothes until they barely clung together, and then lay down and rolled over and over the dry, dusty road. When he got up his disguise was complete—Decatur, who, seeing him ten minutes before, would have passed without recognizing him.

"Now I'll be deaf and dumb—until I find a

boat," muttered Laurie, with a grin at what he could see of himself, and then started back toward the city as his chances of finding a boat were greater in that direction.

He was getting hungry now, and seeing a house just off the road about a half-mile ahead, determined to beg a meal there, for he had no small money and his appearance certainly did not warrant the possession of gold.

Arrived at the house, Laurie made signs to a kindly-faced woman that he was deaf and dumb and hungry, at the same time turning out a previously-prepared pocket to signify he had no money.

The lad's tattered condition, and supposed infirmities, appealed to the woman's sympathies, and she invited him in to a very good meal of "kadeed"—(dried and salted mutton), and "boseen"—(a preparation of flour and water made into a paste, which, being half-baked, is kneaded over again with milk, oil and salt).

He was enjoying this to the fullest, when he saw a party of horsemen, tearing along the road toward the house.

At the head of the party was Abdel Raza, and when they reached the house he called a halt.

The woman of the house went to the door, and, in response to his inquiry, replied that she had seen no one "except this boy inside."

"Call him out!" ordered Abdel.

The conversation was carried on in French, and, as Abdel had seen him but once, Laurie only waited for the signal to march boldly to the door.

Something about him seemed to strike the keen-eyed Arab as familiar, and he leaped from his horse.

"Who are you?" he demanded, striding up to Laurie.

The latter never flinched for an instant. Apparently he only *saw* the question, and kept staring from the speaker to the horseman—which showed him that Ben Ali was not among them.

"Answer me!" cried Abdel angrily.

"He cannot—he can neither speak nor hear," interposed the woman, as the Arab raised his yataghaw threateningly.

"We will see," replied Abdel. "He looks like one I am looking for," and he ordered half-a-dozen horsemen to dismount with their guns.

"Tie him to that!" he ordered, pointing to a young tree growing in front of the house.

"If you do not speak before I count three, I shall say 'Fire!'" said Abdel, when Laurie was tied to the tree, and the horsemen ranged before him with their guns ready to obey the order.

Abdel repeated his words, spoken in French, in Arabic and English, but Laurie preserved his calmness, and the Arab began counting:

"One! Two! Three! Ready!"

CHAPTER XIV.

REPRIEVED—FOR DEAR LIFE—RESCUED.

Upon this child—I saved her, must not leave
 Her life to chance; but point me out some nook
 Of safety, where she may shrink and grieve."

BYRON.

At the word "Ready!" the firing party raised their guns and awaited the order to fire, but something in Laurie's unflinching behavior and calm, impassive countenance seemed to convince Abdel Raza that the woman spoke the truth, and the expected order was not given.

"Never mind that fool!" he said. "Mount and away. We have no time to lose with him!"

The order was instantly obeyed, and the party whirled away in a cloud of dust, leaving Laurie still bound to the tree; but he was quickly released by the woman, who exhibited great joy over his escape.

"If I could only trust her, what a blessing it would be to that girl and Steve!" thought the prisoner, as he watched the woman's face while she was engaged in the quiet, apparently happy task of releasing him, and before she was finished he had resolved to do so.

The woman started back in alarmed surprise when Laurie addressed her, but, without giving her an opportunity to speak, he told his story, ending it by placing a doubloon on the table and craving shelter for the girl and his comrade.

At first the woman refused point-blank, for Abdel Raza, who was nothing more or less than a pirate, was feared by all who knew him, but finally yielded to Laurie's solicitations, and promised to care for Eugenie until he secured a boat.

"But it must not be for long," she said, "for it is a dangerous matter to engage in. There are many prying eyes, and if Abdel discovers I have sheltered you, I as well as you and your friends will be killed."

Laurie assured her that he would exercise the greatest care and secure the boat as soon as possible, and then departed, feeling quite elated over his morning's work.

All that day he prosecuted his search, but evening found him without having secured the much-desired boat.

He had found several, but in each case had also found it dangerous to deal with the captain, and there were none which it seemed at all safe to attempt to seize.

Returning in the evening Laurie met Decatur, and the latter forgot his chagrin at their ill-success in securing a boat in his delight over the finding of a refuge for Eugenie, in whom he appeared to take a wonderful interest considering the length of their acquaintanceship.

Eugenie was brought down from the retreat among the hills, and her appearance—and also perhaps because she was French—caused Madame Moreau to make room for all three although her quarters were limited, which, in turn, caused Laurie to force another big Spanish doubloon on the worthy madame.

For the three days longer Laurie continued his search, each day drawing closer to the Bashaw's castle, and as he returned on the evening of the third day, he determined, if the next was unsuccessful, he would risk entering the city.

The kind-hearted woman with whom Laurie and his friends had taken refuge, was the widow of the captain of a trading vessel, and during his lifetime his house was kept well armed to protect his family and the goods which he sometimes stored away at home.

Some of these arms still remained in the house, and when Laurie returned on the evening of the third day, he found Decatur and Victor, the widow's son, busily engaged in loading guns and pistols.

"What's up?" he asked.

Decatur informed him that Madame Moreau had that day gone to market in Tripoli with a neighbor, whose envy she excited by producing one of the doubloons Laurie had given her.

This neighbor knew all about the escape of Eugenie with the Americans, and had watched Laurie going and coming from the widow's house. Coupling this last with the doubloon, she boldly accused the widow of sheltering the fugitives, and as Abdel offered a reward for information of their whereabouts, declared her intention of telling him what she knew and surmised, unless she received part of the money.

Although placing no reliance on the woman, Madame Moreau silenced her for the moment by giving her the whole doubloon.

"Which was simply throwing away good money," said Decatur, in conclusion, "for she remained in the city instead of coming home, as usual, with Madame Moreau—for what purpose you may easily guess."

"Then you are preparing for a visit from Abdel Raza?"

"Yes, I am certain we will hear from him to-night."

"But why wait for him—why not return to the hills?" asked Laurie.

"Because the husband and two sons of that woman, armed to the teeth, are watching the house, and wherever we went Abdel would be informed of it. When we stopped two would keep watch, while the third returned with the information."

It was then about nine o'clock, the moon was shining brightly, and Decatur's expectations were realized within an hour.

"They are coming!" warned the widow, who was watching from a window above, and soon the noise of a body of horsemen was plainly heard.

"Six to one! They rate us pretty high," said Laurie, who had gone above to count them, but it became seven to one when the three watchers joined the party, who stopped shortly afterward in the roadway near the house.

Dismounting, Abdel, accompanied by two of the band, came to the door, and demanded admittance.

"There's no use resisting," he said, "you know what I've come for and if you don't open instantly I'll burn the house over your heads."

Decatur did not believe the threat would be carried into effect—Abdel wanted his former slave and not her dead body.

"Get away from that door instantly or I'll shoot you, dog that you are!" was Decatur's counter threat, and Abdel and his companions retreated to the roadway.

"Look sharp, Laurie," cautioned Decatur, as the band drew off some distance and dismounted. "They are gone to consult and will return

in a few minutes. I'll watch and fire from the upper windows, while you and Victor keep guard down here."

Followed by the widow and Eugenie, each carrying a gun and pistol, Decatur ascended to the upper floor, and the fight began almost immediately after he took his position at the window.

It is unnecessary to describe the attack and defense of the house in detail. Time after time the Arabs attempted to reach the house unperceived, only to be detected and driven back with some of their number dead or wounded—the boy, Victor, almost invariably killing his man.

About two in the morning there was a lull, the Arabs drawing off some distance. Ten of their number were dead and almost every one of the rest, including Abdel, wounded.

The latter was furious over the unexpected and deadly resistance of Decatur and his friends.

"Hadji!" he called to one of his men. "Go to the fort and get me a dozen—two dozen men at once. I will burn the house over those Frankish dogs, if it takes all Tripoli to do it!"

Decatur heard this threat quite plainly, and he knew it was meant, not uttered merely for effect. He had already ascertained Victor's ability as a marksman, and called out:

"Victor, see if you can reach that scoundrel!"

But there was no need to urge the youth—he was burning to avenge his father, whom it was almost certain Abdel Raza had killed, after plundering his ship. He had already fired at the pirate chief several times, but had succeeded only in wounding him.

Abdel and his band were now, however, out of range of the guns of that date, although in plain view of the house, and they did not stir until the messenger returned from the city two hours later, at the head of twenty men.

The horsemen immediately dismounted, and the attack was renewed.

Abdel's band now numbered thirty, and ammunition was running low in the house, but day was breaking, and for a short time the Arabs were kept off.

At length one fellow got close enough to hurl a blazing torch on the low, wooden roof, and before it could be dislodged, the house, dry as a tinder-box, was afire.

A triumphant yell from the Arabs greeted this misfortune of the besieged, and, after firing several volleys at the windows of the house, they stood waiting impatiently for the flames to consume or drive out the doomed inmates.

Decatur started out through the scuttle to knock off the torch, but nearly paid for his temerity with his life, being driven below badly wounded in the shoulder, and nearly stunned by a bullet which grazed his scalp.

There was only one pail of water in the house, and that Laurie threw on the blazing roof, but it was of course useless.

Their situation was indeed desperate, for in a few minutes the fire had gathered so much headway that, even if unmolested by the Arabs, they could not have extinguished it. Even resourceful Laurie could think of nothing but to rush out among the Arabs and die fighting.

"The women can follow a half-minute after, and will thus escape the volley that will be fired at us," said Laurie.

The heat was now unbearable, and with a parting clasp of the hand they prepared for the coming death-struggle, each arming himself with a pistol and yataghan, although none might have a chance to use them.

"Get ready!" cried Decatur, ready to open the door.

"One moment, Mr. Decatur!"

It was Eugenie who spoke, and, as he turned to her, she continued:

"Please let me go with you—or shoot me before you leave us."

Decatur understood her, and stood hesitating. It seemed a horrible thing to do, and yet—

"Please do not refuse this last and greatest favor," she pleaded. "Death is infinitely preferable to the fate that awaits me, if I fall into the hands of those fiends!"

"You are right!" exclaimed Decatur, firmly. "But I wish it were another hand you had chosen for the deed. If I had not learned to love you—But enough of that."

He stepped slowly toward her as he spoke, the eyes of each fixed on the other, and those of the others on them.

In the excitement, Decatur forgot that he had unfastened the door, which now swung open unnoticed. The Arabs, however, saw it, and when Decatur raised his pistol—thinking all were about to commit suicide, and thus

cheat them of their revenge—fired a volley through the open doorway and rushed to secure the survivors.

A curse burst from the lips of Abdel Raza, as he saw his beautiful slave fall.

Eugenie's prayer appeared to have been strangely answered.

CHAPTER XV.

GENTLEMAN GEORGE "ON DECK."

"Their preparation is to-day by sea."

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

WHEN Eugenie fell as the Arabs dashed forward, Decatur thought his pistol must have gone off accidentally; but a sharp pain in his shoulder reminded him of the volley, and firing his pistol at the approaching party, he rushed to meet them, yataghan in hand.

Victor, who had escaped unhurt, rushed after him, while Laurie, who had been hit in the side, staggered after both.

As Laurie passed through the doorway, another volley rung out, but it was one that laid many an Arab low, and was followed by a wild hurrah, as a party of sailors, firing as they came, dashed up from the shore.

The new-comers were headed by a gray-haired man and a youth in naval uniform, and the latter caught Laurie in his arms as he was about fall, crying:

"Laurie! Laurie, old boy, I hope you're not badly hurt!"

The youth was Midshipman Spence, the gray-haired man Hawkins, master gunner of the *Enterprise*, and these two, paying no further attention to the fight, carried Laurie to a spring at the back of the burning house.

In a very few minutes Laurie had recovered sufficiently to assure his friends that he was merely weak from loss of blood, and to tell them that there was either one or two women in the burning building.

Spence and Hawkins started to go to it, when they saw two women coming toward the spring, and returned to inform Laurie.

"Two!" echoed Laurie, in surprise. "Then one of 'em must be a ghost, for I saw Steve shoot her."

But, as we know, he was wrong. Nor was Eugenie injured by the volley; her overtaxed nerves had given way when the Arabs fired, and she fainted.

The onslaught of the sailors was so fierce and unexpected that the Arabs fled to their horses—that is, those that were able, and within five minutes Decatur and Victor were returning at the head of the rescuers.

On reaching the house, Decatur paused, and looked mournfully into the blazing interior. He was perfectly satisfied that the body of her to whom he had become so strongly attached in the last few days, should be burnt—it would prevent desecration of the temple of the heroic and loving spirit.

After a few minutes the walls fell in, and, with a sigh and a broken-hearted expression of countenance, Decatur started to join his comrades—for he had learned of the presence of Gentleman George.

As he turned the corner, Decatur stiffened up; before him was Laurie lying on the ground, and beside the latter, dressing his wound, was Eugenie!

Could he believe his eyes?

Well, he was compelled to do so when the girl's attention was attracted by the glances of those around her who were staring at Decatur's strange action.

"Oh! Excuse me!" she cried.

And leaving poor Laurie, leaped to meet Decatur, and then, oblivious of the presence of the others, convinced "Stephen" that it was flesh and blood he was gazing upon by throwing her arms round his neck.

In an instant the impulsive, warm-hearted girl remembered that they were not alone, and drew back blushing furiously.

Decatur and Eugenie were kindred spirits—made for each other—and, the first surprise over, he was as calm as the metaphoric clam.

"That's all right, Eugenie!" he said. "Let me introduce you to my friend Spence."

And taking her by the hand, led her back to the spring where the gentleman, who had heard his purposely loud-spoken talk, awaited their coming, and was introduced to "Miss De Mornay."

"By Jove! Decatur's 'struck' to the best blood in France," thought Spence, who was better versed than his comrades regarding social matters.

"You've got a boat, George?" asked Decatur, after a few minutes.

"Oh, yes. I bought a schooner to come after—that is, we have a schooner lying just below here."

"Why didn't you finish, and say you bought a schooner to come after us, George?" asked Laurie, who, although still very weak, was an attentive witness of and listener to all that was going on around him.

"Well, we must get out of here—and pretty quick, too," said Decatur, stopping Spence's reply.

"All right! Be careful with this gentleman (indicating Laurie), and get down to the boat as soon as possible," assented Gentleman George, addressing the first part of his speech to Decatur, and the last to the seamen who were to carry Laurie to the shore.

As it would be unsafe to remain in Tripoli, Madame Moreau accepted Decatur's offer to have her returned to France and accompanied the party to the schooner.

"How the deuce did you come to be here?" asked Decatur, as he and Spence walked beside the improvised litter upon which Laurie was resting.

"Oh, it's a long story—wait until we get aboard," replied the midshipman, adding:

"But I'll tell you one thing—I am on leave."

"And we are not—eh?" laughed Decatur.

"But you needn't be worried, George," he continued, in a more serious tone, "it will take Abdel an hour—"

"Abdel is dead," quietly interposed Victor, who, with his mother and Eugenie, was walking close behind.

"I'm right glad to hear it—now we may rest easy as far as pursuit is concerned from that quarter, but it will be as well to get away at once."

Once aboard the party descended to the cabin and Spence told his story and Eugenie hers—the last one having a startling and at the same time depressing effect on Decatur.

The "Algiers" had been badly cut up in her engagement with the "Enterprise," and Captain Sterrett's orders being to join the commodore as soon as the injuries to his own vessel were repaired, he left Lieutenant Dare to follow with the prize.

Aware of the attachment existing between the lieutenant and the three inseparables, the captain replaced Decatur with Spence, and sailed two days after the disappearance of the former and Laurie.

On the following morning, the midshipman held a consultation with Hawkins, (who replaced Morgan on the prize,) and the result was an interview with Dare, in which Spence asked leave of absence for two weeks—the length of time it was expected the "Algiers" would remain at Malta.

"I am uneasy about Laurie and Decatur," explained Spence, "they may be in trouble. As you know, I am rich in my own right, and I have plenty of money with me to hire a small vessel. Then, if you will permit me, I will take Hawkins and go to Tripoli. He knows every spot in and about the place, and if anything has happened we will find it out. If they are all right we'll bring them back. They may be afraid to come back, you know, on account of the duel."

In view of the letter received from the two lieutenants, the latter part of the midshipman's argument was good enough to cause Dare to grant the desired leave of absence.

Spence immediately chartered a schooner, and Hawkins picked out twenty Maltese sailors—half pirates themselves who did not care who they fought against as long as the pay was good—and Spence was nothing if not liberal.

"Well, my boy, you arrived in the very nick of time," said Decatur, at the conclusion of the story. "Now we'll hear from Eugenie—Miss—or rather Mademoiselle de Morny."

"Rather mixed up, Steve," observed Laurie from the lounge, and grinning in spite of his pain and weakness.

Eugenie's story was short, simple and tragic.

The ship in which she and her father were traveling from France to Madeira was captured by Abdel Raza, and her father killed. Incidentally, Eugenie mentioned the fact that her brother would now be the Count de Morny, and when she mentioned that innocent fact Decatur was thunderstruck.

There was a tremendous, horrible gap between the daughter of one of the richest and most noble families in France, and a lieutenant in the American Navy, almost dependent upon his pay.

"Sail ho!" interrupted Decatur's gloomy

meditations. In less than a minute, Hawkins stuck his head into the cabin to say:

"An Algerian cruiser!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SPOILED FIGHT—A FRIEND IN NEED.

"Care follows hard, and soon o'ertakes
The well-rigged ship; the warlike steed
His destined quarry le'er forsakes.
Not the wind flees with half the speed."

COWPER.

DECATUR and Laurie were both lieutenants, but the former had two years' seniority of Hawkins's pet and pupil in gunnery, and it was to him the latter repeated his announcement—for the hero of Tripoli was still stunned by the words:

"My brother will never be the Count de Morny."

"Eh? What's that, Hawkins?" asked Decatur, starting to his feet.

"An Algerian cruiser, sir," repeated Hawkins. "If it's the one I think, she's commanded by Abdel Raza's brother. She's about three miles to the leeward, but on the same tack as we are, and bearing down at every turn. Some of them beggars must have run across him."

Before Hawkins was half through Decatur was on his feet, and when the former stopped, he bowed to the two ladies and left the cabin.

Sure enough a brig showing the Algerian colors was bearing down from Tripoli, and, as she brought the wind with her, gaining on every tack, but Decatur was not at all alarmed at that.

"For," said he, "when we get the full strength of the breeze, I think we'll be able to show him a little bit of sailing."

"She's a beauty, sir—she showed it comin' here. We run away from everythin' between here 'n' Malta," replied Hawkins.

Within an hour, the Algerian had reduced the distance between the two vessels to one mile, but the schooner was now beginning to feel the breeze, and held her own.

This was hardly apparent before a shot came plunging across the stern of the schooner, and Decatur was startled the next instant by a voice at his elbow, saying:

"Why don't you return the compliment, Steve?"

Turning quickly, Decatur was in time to catch the approving nod of Hawkins, who was standing at the companionway hatch beside Spence and Laurie.

The latter, unable to bear the suspense, had come on deck just as the shot was fired, and greeted the astonished look of Decatur with a faint smile.

"It's all right, Steve," he said, "why don't you try that thirty-two on him?"—indicating the gun in the stern of the schooner.

"Do you think you could do anything?" asked Decatur, addressing Hawkins. "If you do, go ahead!"

Hawkins walked to the gun, adjusted and sighted it, and as he pulled the lanyard, said:

"There goes her foretopmast, sir."

He was as good as his word, as was proved a moment later, and now the schooner drew steadily away from her pursuer, which after another half-hour gave up the hopeless pursuit.

As soon as it was apparent that there was no more danger, Laurie, assisted by Spence, descended to the cabin and so informed the ladies, but Decatur remained on deck, gloomy and silent. He was not present at dinner—pleading lack of appetite as an excuse, and it was not until toward evening he was himself again.

Fighting was his forte, and at sunset there appeared to be a fair chance that the schooner would have to do plenty of it.

"That craft on the weather bow is eating right into the wind, sir. Looks as if she was tryin' to get at us," said Hawkins, at six bells in the dog-watch (seven o'clock) referring to a schooner that was quite evidently trying to get within range, and which had been sighted two hours before.

That the stranger was armed and well-manned they could see, and that she was anxious to get within range of the Santa Marie was evidenced by her gunner standing beside the bow chaser, which he sighted every now and then as if eager to begin.

"Have them reef the topsails—fool them!" ordered Decatur, and after allowing astonishment to get the better of discipline in the way of a startled stare, Hawkins communicated the order to the master.

The Santa Marie carried four guns on each side, and a bow and stern chaser—ten guns in

all, and was well supplied with small-arms, but the stranger carried three or four times as many men, which was the cause of the gunner's astonishment.

The stranger appeared to be equally astonished at the result of Decatur's strange order, and stood away for a few minutes. Then she fired a gun and hoisted the white field of France.

"The fellow's a fool!" exclaimed Decatur, as the *drapeau blanc* was given to the breeze. "Why don't he come on? See if you can coax him, Hawkins. Try him with the Portuguese colors; let's see if Brazil diamonds find favor in his eyes."

"Evidently they do," remarked Laurie, who came on deck just as the emblem of the House of Braganza was loosened, and the stranger bore down again, eating closer and closer into the wind.

"Surely, you are not going to risk a fight, Steve?" added Laurie, after a look at the stranger and then at the reduced sail of the Santa Marie.

"That depends on the other fellow—I won't chase him," replied Decatur, with a reckless laugh.

"But the women, Steve?"

But remonstrance was vain; Decatur appeared to welcome the stranger bearing down on them. He was in a wild, mad mood, and carelessly replied:

"Oh, I guess we can take care of them."

Laurie, however, was not willing that they should risk an engagement. He understood what was wrong, and whispered a few words to Spence, who went below, while he examined the rapidly approaching stranger.

Suddenly Laurie started, and turning to Decatur, said:

"For Heaven's sake, Steve, make sail before it's too late! That fellow standing in the bow of that vessel is the man who trapped us at Gibraltar—Vernier; and you know what a heavy crew he carries, as well as what treatment Miss de Morny and Madame Moreau—"

"Set your topsails! Loose everything, and let her run before the wind!" cried Decatur, interrupting his friend just as the two ladies appeared on deck.

"You had better remain below," he continued, on seeing Eugenie; "there will be some firing soon."

The same instant a column of smoke issued from the bows of the stranger, then came the report of the gun and a shot dropped just astern of the Santa Marie, which, with every sail set and running free, was beginning to draw away from the pursuer.

The day had hitherto been cloudless, and a vault of purer blue never canopied a waste of water than the arch which had stretched for hours above the heads of our marine adventurers. But now, as if nature frowned on the bloody designs of Vernier—for it was the ex-midshipman—a dark, threatening mass of vapor was blending the ocean with the sky, in a direction opposed to the currents of air.

"We have a squall brewing, sir," said Hawkins, pointing to the frowning symptoms.

"Yes," assented Decatur: "better get in your light canvas—it will burst very soon."

The order was obeyed, and now Vernier, who, unmindful of the danger, kept all his sails set, began to gain rapidly—so rapidly that he refrained from firing, evidently intending to take the Santa Marie by the board—and soon only a quarter of a mile separated the two vessels.

"Since he will not do it himself, see if you can bring down those topsails," ordered Decatur.

"Ay, ay, sir," returned Hawkins, stepping to the stern chaser and deliberately sighting it.

The usual moments of suspense succeeded the firing of the gun, and then the fragments of the foretopmast of the pursuer were scattered in the air.

At the same moment the squall burst, and the artillery of Heaven opened on the unprepared vessel of Vernier, which reeled before the blast, the first breath of which carried away the maintopmast, and swept sail after sail from the bolt-ropes.

"By Jupiter! he's paying for his carelessness!" exclaimed Decatur, casting a hasty glance over his own vessel; but even as he spoke their pursuer received another and more terrible blow.

This time it was from the lightning, which struck the foremast and had riven it into several pieces, and it fell over the larboard bow, carrying a number of the crew with it as well as the maintopmast and jib-boom over at the same time.

When the masts went over the crippled vessel broached to furiously, throwing the men over the wheel and dashing them senseless against the guns.

"She will certainly go down!" exclaimed Spence.

"I don't think so—the worst is past," returned Decatur.

This proved to be the case, the squall soon swept over the spot, leaving the sea rather stilled than agitated by the counteracting influence of the wind, and the Santa Marie, which had been hove to, was got under way.

"Well, he isn't likely to bother any one for some time," observed Decatur, as the Maltese spread their canvas.

Just then, as if fearing attack, Vernier's vessel swung round with her head pointed for Tripoli, bringing her stern into view, and a handkerchief was seen waving from one of the after-cabin windows.

"It is—it must be Mrs. Dare!" cried Laurie.

"Quick, Steve! About ship, and after her!"

CHAPTER XVII.

RESCUE OF THE CAPTIVE—THE RETURN.

"—Yet again? What do you here? Shall we give o'er and drown? Have you a mind to sink?"

TEMPEST.

LAURIE knew and surmised more regarding Dare's affairs than his comrades, who stared at him in astonishment, but, in accordance with his excited demand, the Santa Marie was put about and started in pursuit.

It was not a difficult matter to overhaul the pirate, and, seeing escape was hopeless, Vernier prepared to make a desperate, and almost equally hopeless resistance.

More than half of his crew had been killed, drowned or injured, his vessel was almost unmanageable, and himself wounded and still half-dazed by a blow from a falling spar, but he expected no mercy, and stood on the quarter-deck directing his men, who were endeavoring to bring their vessel broadside on to the Santa Marie.

"He is a madman to attempt to fight his ship in that condition," said Laurie, as they drew near. "Why, we can stand off and sink him, if we wish before he could head her around."

Apparently realizing this at the same moment, Vernier ordered his men to the guns, and himself pointed the stern-chaser—the only one he could bring to bear on the Santa Marie.

"Hang the fellow!" exclaimed Decatur, angrily. "He will compel us to sink him, and thus defeat our object in coming back."

"Why not tell him what we want?" suggested Laurie, adding quickly, as he saw the bare-headed, blood-stained figure was ready to fire:

"Fire a gun to leeward, and run up a white flag—quick, Hawkins!"

The helm was put alee, and the Santa Marie came sweeping up into the wind, disconcerting Vernier's aim, and causing him to withhold his fire long enough to enable Hawkins to carry out Laurie's orders.

For a minute or two there was no response—surprise undoubtedly causing the delay. Then came the answering gun, and a flag similar to their own was raised on the pirate.

"Don't trust too much to that," warned Hawkins, hearing Decatur speak of lowering a boat, adding:

"Better bear down till ye can hail him, 'n' then say what's wanted—it's safer, 'n' then, ag'in, if he don't want to give her up, the crew may make him."

The suggestion was a good one, and precisely what the gunner predicted happened. Vernier laughed jeeringly, and swore he would sink before he would surrender Mrs. Dare.

"Then you shall!" cried Decatur, and following the gunner's idea, added: "We did not return to harm you—we only want Mrs. Dare, but if you will not give her up willingly, we must force you."

This threat caused the pirates to gather around their captain, and one bolder than the rest pointed out that when the white flag came down, their decks would be swept by the guns of the Santa Marie.

"Grape and canister are very convincing arguments, captain," said the second officer, and pointing to the other vessel, continued:

"She's at pistol-shot range, and we're at their mercy—there won't be a man left ten minutes after she begins firing. Better give them the woman."

One searching glance at the crew convinced Vernier that the request for his consent was merely a matter of form: the crew to a man

were against him, and would surrender his captive in any event.

"Mutinous dog! I'll pay you for this!" muttered Vernier, but he nodded assent, and immediately Mrs. Dare was brought up and placed in the small boat, which was pulled to the Santa Marie.

"Good-by! Hope you'll have no more trouble!" called Decatur, as Laurie welcomed Mrs. Dare, whose beaming countenance showed the joy she felt at her escape.

The schooner was got under way, and Decatur and Spence followed Mrs. Dare and Laurie—who fairly worshiped the beautiful wife of his best friend—to the cabin, where Mrs. Dare told how Vernier, during the absence of her brother, Captain King, had entered their residence at dead of night and carried her off.

"It was the night before the Enterprise was to sail," said Mrs. Dare, "and he searched my desk and carried off my writing-paper—for what purpose I cannot imagine."

"I can," thought Laurie, remembering the effect the mysterious letter had on Lieutenant Dare.

"The scoundrel! We should have blown him out of the water!" exclaimed Decatur.

"Oh, no—not for the world! He treated me—aside from the confinement to the cabin—with the greatest respect," said Mrs. Dare, adding thoughtfully:

"It must have been simply to annoy my husband. I trust he has not succeeded."

"Well, if he did, it will soon be ended, for we will be back within two days," replied Laurie, cutting off any injudicious talk his comrades might be inclined to give way to.

Then, leaving the ladies in possession of the cabin, the two lieutenants and the midshipman returned to the deck, where Laurie warned his friends against talking too freely about Dare.

"Let him do the talking," he said, and when, two days later, the schooner dropped anchor alongside the Algiers, Mrs. Dare was in blissful ignorance of the worry Vernier's letters had caused her husband.

The latter had seen and recognized the Santa Marie, and was glad to see Laurie and Decatur on its deck.

"Well, you've brought no prize to serve as an excuse this time," he said, as the two lieutenants, followed by Spence, came on the main deck of the Algiers.

"Beg pardon, but we have—the best we could by any possibility bring you," returned Laurie, and then turning to Spence, said:

"Keep the men in the boat, George! Mr. Dare may wish to see Mrs. Dare aboard the schooner."

"What's that?" gasped Dare.

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Dare and two other ladies are aboard the schooner—safe and unharmed. We met Vernier and persuaded him to give her up."

Without waiting to hear any more, Dare hurried down the ladder into the boat and was quickly on board the Santa Marie, being received by his wife, who, in accordance with Laurie's plan, had been watching him from the after-cabin windows, and timed her appearance on deck to meet him.

What followed their meeting is of little interest, and, at all events, has no bearing on this story, but when Dare returned to the Algiers, his countenance was beaming.

"You have indeed brought me a prize—one I can never thank you sufficiently for," he said to Laurie.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT TRIPOLI

"Three cheers for victory!
Hushed be each plaint o'er fallen brave;
Still every sigh to messmate given;
The seaman's tomb is in the wave."

EVENTS crowded rapidly. The "Algiers," now re-named the "Scourge," was ready to, and did, sail to join the fleet on the evening of the day Mrs. Dare arrived.

"Send Mrs. Dare with the other ladies to Mr. Mackay, at Gibraltar—the 'Santa Marie' is only waiting for stores to bring the others there," suggested Laurie, while conversing with the first lieutenant regarding the disposition to be made of the latter's wife.

The master of the schooner had proven a smart and faithful fellow, and being half-pirate himself—he carried letters of marque—the trip to Gibraltar would be made in safety, so Dare assented to Laurie's suggestion, which was not entirely disinterested, and the two vessels sailed late that afternoon—each arriving in due course at its destination.

Mrs. Dare and the other ladies, armed with letters from Dare, Decatur, Laurie and Spence were warmly received by Mr. Mackay, while her husband enjoyed an equally warm reception from Commodore Preble.

Like the Irishman whose appearance the Duke of Wellington awaited before beginning the Battle of Waterloo—according to the aforesaid modest Celt—the arrival of Lieutenant Dare was the signal for beginning operations against the Bashaw.

That an attack would be a dangerous and desperate affair was a foregone conclusion, but Commodore Preble had the flower of the American Navy serving under him—captains serving as lieutenants in order to have an opportunity to be in the fight.

Commodore Preble was on board the flag-ship "Constitution," carrying 44 guns; Lieutenant Hull had command of the "Argus," carrying 16 guns—24-pounders; Lieutenant Charles Stewart—who died a rear-admiral, and grandfather of the late Charles Stewart Parnell—commanded the "Syren," also carrying 16 24-pounders. Lieutenant Dare was in command of the "Scourge," 14 18-pound guns; Lieutenant Smith of the "Vixen," carrying 12 eighteens; Lieutenant Somers of the "Nautilus," also 12 eighteens; and Lieutenant Stephen Decatur of the "Enterprise," also 12 eighteens.

Besides this force, Commodore Preble had six gunboats and two bomb-katches, borrowed from the King of Naples, but opposed to it was a walled city protected by a heavy battery of 115 guns and 19 gunboats—each carrying a long brass eighteen or twenty-four in the bow and two howitzers abaft—a brig of 10 guns, two schooners of 18 guns each and two galleys, each mounting 4 guns—the whole of which were sheltered by a long range of rocks and shoals extending more than two miles eastward from the town, rendering it impossible for a vessel of the draught of the "Constitution" to co-operate with light-draught vessels against the Bashaw's land-force of 25,000 men.

The squadron ran in with the wind E. S. E., anchoring two-and-one-half miles from the town. Then a heavy gale arose lasting three days and preventing further operations.

On the fourth day the squadron ran in again, with an easterly breeze, to within two miles of the batteries—now protected by twenty-one large gunboats and several smaller ones.

Stephen Decatur, in command of Gunboat No. 4, was successful in boarding the largest of the enemy's squadron.

He had just seen his brother James killed, and laying his boat alongside, Decatur boarded the much larger vessel of the enemy with the ferocity of a tiger, and captured her after a hard fight.

Still full of vengeance, Decatur attacked another large gunboat, fighting hand-to-hand with its captain—a gigantic Turk, who was armed with a cutlass.

Decatur fought with a pike, and, this breaking, he shot the Turk dead with his small pistol.

Just as the Turk fell, his second officer came at Decatur from behind and, for a moment, his life hung by a hair, but, as the sword was coming down, Reuben James, who had been shot through both arms, rushed in and took the blow on his bared head.

As he fell, Decatur drove a cutlass he had picked up through the Turk, and the crew of the pirate—now without a leader—surrendered.

While this was going on, Spence, in command of a boat and twenty-eight men, started to attack another pirate, but a hot shot through his magazine put a stop to his operations.

The bow gun was being loaded at the time, and with his own hand the midshipman finished the work by firing it, amid three rousing cheers from his crew as the boat sunk under them.

That was the act of a boy—barely sixteen!

The foremast of the vessel Spence was about to engage was brought down by his shot, and the commodore on the Constitution, noting the fact and the act, Gentleman George—unknown to himself—was made a lieutenant on the spot.

And now to Laurie's share in this engagement with the only foreign country where the American flag ever has been raised.

Laurie was in command of Enterprise, Gunboat No. 5, and, in his usual cool style, ran in until within pistol-shot range of the Bashaw's Castle—Fort English.

The very hardihood of this act appeared to protect him, and Commodore Preble, in the mizzen shrouds of the Constitution, as well as the commanders of the other vessels, watched the daring lad in astonishment as he opened fire on three batteries—the Crown, Mole and Fort English, mounting in all 115 guns.

"By heavens, sir!" exclaimed the commodore, addressing Captain Sterrett, who was now on the Constitution. "That is the pluckiest act I've ever witnessed! Your three midshipmen are now three lieutenants, and I hope you'll be able to find three more like them."

Captain Sterrett smiled a little proudly, but his reply was cut short by an exclamation from the commodore.

Gunboat No. 5 seemed to bear a charmed fate—shot rained over and around it, but none hit it, and, encouraged by its good fortune, a cutter with eighteen men commanded by a master's mate (Mr. Creighton), pulled to its assistance.

During the night following the day's bombardment of Tripoli a heavy gale arose, which compelled the squadron to remain inactive for a day.

"There goes the signal on the Constitution!" exclaimed Laurie, on the morning of the next day.

And the squadron immediately got under way, running in with an easterly breeze.

When within two miles of the batteries, another signal brought the squadron to anchor, and then, under cover of a heavy fire, Gunboat No. 4, commanded by Decatur, ran in and attacked the largest of the enemy's vessels, which was captured after a fierce hand-to-hand fight, although the Algerians greatly outnumbered the Americans.

This, with the sinking of three gunboats—two by the flagship, Constitution, and one by the Scourge, commanded by Dare, constituted the work of destruction on the water, but the city suffered terribly from the shells.

The Scourge escaped with little damage, but the Constitution had suffered considerably in spars and rigging, and at the close of the day the commodore signaled the squadron to draw off.

At daybreak next morning a large frigate was discovered about two miles off, which proved to be the John Adams, commanded by Captain Chauncey.

This was a welcome and valuable addition to the squadron, and immediately after breakfast the bombardment was renewed.

Encouraged by his good fortune on the first day, Laurie again ran in under the guns of the forts, far beyond the bomb-ketches, but escaped without injury, while a boat of the John Adams, which advanced the furthest of all that emulated his daring example, was sunk almost immediately by a double-headed shot from one of the batteries.

The boats, bomb-ketches and smaller vessels were now at close range, and consequently their fire was more than usually destructive, but being in this position necessitated their being themselves under unusually heavy fire.

Seeing the boats would be unable to maintain their good work without assistance, the Constitution ran down to the rocks until within grape-shot distance, where she poured in eleven broadsides upon castle, town and batteries, while the ketches played on the town itself with deadly effect, and the smaller vessels followed the example of the frigate.

It is a remarkable historical fact that, although while thus engaged, Old Ironsides was under the fire of seventy heavy guns, she lost not one of her officers or men. On the other hand, the havoc wrought by her murderously close broadsides, and the united fire of the ketches and other vessels, was so great as to cause Commodore Preble to decide that the Bashaw had received sufficient punishment for his insolent demands upon the American Government.

And, indeed, until the lower part of Tripoli was rebuilt, and his captured and sunken vessels replaced, the Bashaw did not forget the lesson. When he did, an even more severe punishment was administered—but that's another story.

Having come to this decision, and having made such temporary repairs as were necessary, the commodore ordered the squadron to Malta, where the more seriously injured vessels were hove down to refit, while the others cruised about to pick up any pirates that might have courage enough to stray from their now dismantled nest.

As the Scourge had been badly cut up in the last day's engagement, Lieutenant Dare had an opportunity to be ashore, as had Spence, who, since the sinking of his boat, was aboard the Constitution, which was also badly damaged.

Decatur and Laurie, however, had no excuse to go ashore, except for a very limited period, but Captain Sterrett and Dare exerted sufficient influence to obtain leave of absence for both during the refitting of the vessel.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE—JEALOUSY—QUARRELS.

Then there were sighs, the deeper for suppression, And stolen glances, the sweeter for the theft, And burning cheeks, though for no transgression, Tremblings when met, and restlessness when left. All these are little preludes to possession, Of which young passion cannot be bereft, And merely tend to show how greatly love is Embarrassed, at first starting, with a novice.

BYRON.

THE arrival of Captain Dare—he was now appointed to the Scourge, with his former rank—and the three lieutenants, threw the quiet household of Mr. Mackay into a state of joyous excitement.

Everybody was, of course, glad to meet everybody else—but some were particularly so.

Dare, for instance, to rejoin his wife. Decatur to meet Eugenie, and Laurie to bashfully declare his pleasure on seeing Agnes.

The boys—and they were really little more—had little to do at Malta, except enjoy themselves as much as possible.

Captain Dare looked after the Scourge, thus giving his young subordinates opportunity to prosecute their love siege, which they did—most fiercely on Decatur's part.

The latter seemed to have gotten over the dismay he exhibited on learning that Eugenie was the daughter of the Count de Morny.

He made no attempt to hide his delight on again meeting her, nor the reason of it, and it was apparent to all that the young lieutenant was gaining ground.

"Steve believes in making hay while the sun shines," commented Spence, as when, toward the completion of repairs, Decatur quietly informed his friends that he had written to Eugenie's mother.

"For," said he, "I might as well know at once what she thinks of it."

"Then you are engaged to her?" asked Laurie.

"As much as one can be to a French girl without the consent of her parents."

"I have told the countess who and what I am," continued Decatur, "and what my prospects are."

"France is now Republican, and nobility can't amount to a great deal, so I guess there's a fair chance for me."

And there was, but it was the letter that Eugenie dispatched the same day, that brought a somewhat favorable reply to his request—although not definite.

"I hope he won't make such a fool of himself as you do," remarked George, when Decatur, having told his news, left the former and Laurie together.

"What do you mean?" stammered the latter, turning very red.

"Oh, Laurie, you make me sick! I've heard the expression, 'love-sick school-boy,' used as denoting something particularly idiotic, but it won't do justice to your case."

"You will not let her walk or talk with any one else, and, when she's with you, you simply look like a blessed idiot and say nothing!"

This was strong language from Gentleman George, but it probably covered the state of affairs between Agnes and Laurie.

"You are not a gentleman!" angrily retorted Laurie.

"Well, I'm working, at any rate," coolly returned George, adding, as he looked at his watch and bowed to his friend:

"It's time for me to be on board—shall we see your smiling countenance to-day, or will you be engaged?"

Before the excited Laurie could reply, he was alone—George, warned by the expression of his countenance, having slipped out.

Spence's words worked wonders, however, with Laurie, who, instead of spending the day with Agnes, reported to Captain Dare that he desired no further leave of absence.

"A quarrel!" was the captain's mental comment, but it was not, as he supposed, between Agnes and Laurie, for the latter had the full approbation of the girl he was so interested in, in returning to his duty.

The fierce love-making of Decatur, and the bashful, though quietly persistent, devotion of Laurie, had excited considerable comment, and no little amusement, among Mr. Mackay's many friends and acquaintances—more especially the garrison and naval officers.

This was the secret of George's censure; Agnes's approbation, and of one of the fiercest duels ever fought.

The gallant, though ill-fated, Richard Somers returned in the Nautilus, on the same day that Laurie did to the Scourge, and learning from

the latter where Decatur was staying ashore, and why, started to visit him.

Other officers were going ashore, and Somers was invited to join several, who were going to dine at an inn much frequented by both naval and military men.

Much misinformation existed in each profession regarding the character of those engaged in the other, and this was all the greater where the other was that of a foreign country.

Many English and other officers, who had been attracted by the rank and beauty of Eugenie, but had been put aside for Decatur, were present when Somers and his friends arrived at the inn.

The entrance of the Americans brought up the name of Decatur, and soon it was being treated with contempt by a party of three, sitting at a table nearest which sat Somers.

Until the name of Eugenie began to be connected with that of his friend, Somers made no remark, but when that occurred, he turned and deliberately commanded:

"Keep quiet there! You are annoying the whole company with your noise!"

As a matter of fact, he was the only outsider who could hear what was said, but it would never do to bring Eugenie's name into the affair, so he took that method of insulting them into silence.

An apology and explanation was instantly demanded, and refused point-blank.

"Then, sir, there is my card!" exclaimed one, throwing a piece of pasteboard before Somers.

"And mine! And mine!" added the others, following their companion's example.

"Two lieutenants and a captain, eh?" coolly commented Somers, as he inspected the cards, adding:

"Very well, gentlemen. There is mine. Now, when, and where, is entirely immaterial to me."

"Arrange the affair as you please, but" (in a low tone) "you are officers, and should be gentlemen, so, I trust, the cause will not be referred to."

As Somers finished, and while the three challengers, as well as his friends, were staring at him in astonished silence, Decatur entered.

"Ah! Just the man!" exclaimed Somers, advancing to meet his friend. "Steve, I must ask you to act for me."

"I've insulted these three gentlemen, and will positively not apologize, so arrange matters to suit them, without discussion."

With the last words, Somers walked out, and Decatur was left to act as second in three duels, in which, had he suspected the cause, he would have fought to be principal.

No one, however, could tell just why Somers had insulted the challengers, so, following instructions, Decatur promptly arranged for a meeting—promising, if his friend should be unable to do so, to furnish the required satisfaction.

CHAPTER XX.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

"My love is like the sea,
As changeful and as free;
Sometimes she's angry, sometimes rough,
Yet oft she's smooth and calm enough—
Ay, much too calm for me."

THERE was a great deal of rivalry among the young officers under command of Commodore Preble, but the incident of the challenges invited by Somers (to protect the name of his friend) furnishes a striking illustration of the friendship which also existed among them.

Having arranged for the duels, Decatur hurried to join his friend.

"Oh, they were talking too much, and I bade them keep quiet," was all the explanation Somers would make.

"Have you settled everything?" he continued.

"Yes—pistols at daybreak to-morrow," replied Decatur, adding:

"But, I say, Dick! You'll never be able to handle all three. Better let one of us into it!"

"Laurie could act as second to both of us."

"Not much! It's my quarrel—and I'm not entangled as you are."

Richard Somers was then a young man of about twenty-three. He was mild, amiable and affectionate, both in disposition and deportment, though of singularly chivalrous notions of duty and honor.

Decatur understood his friend's nature. He, also, understood the allusion to his engagement to Eugenie, and made no further immediate attempt to play the part of principal in the impending duels.

"Very well, Dick," he said, "I will not interfere unless it becomes necessary."

"Let us hope it will not," quietly returned Somers, adding:

"I have some letters to write, and you have a call to make—I think, so you had better be off."

"You will remain here to-night?"

"I shall."

"All right. I'll attend to having you called."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

It was a quiet, ordinary parting between two friends, yet neither underrated the danger, and, during the balance of the night, Decatur was strangely thoughtful.

There was a large gathering at the Mackays that evening, and many eyes were turned upon the young lieutenant, when he appeared in the drawing-room.

Already there were rumors of a duel between some English and American officers, and Decatur's preoccupied air lent color to one story that he was one of the principals, and Eugenie the cause.

This story, circulated rapidly, soon reached the cause, who was by no means pleased with the notoriety she was attaining, and when Decatur approached she asked:

"Do you know that there is an absurd rumor that you are going to fight a duel?"

"Dame Rumor plays sorry tricks with Truth," was the careless reply, adding:

"Have you seen anything of Laurie?"

"Then it is true?" angrily, and disregarding his question.

The tone was a new one, and Decatur looked at the fair speaker in surprise.

"I presume, then, the rest of the story is true?" continued Eugenie.

"I don't understand you, but it probably is not."

"What is the rest?"

Expecting that Somers would be wounded certainly in the second, if not in the first, duel, Decatur felt sure he would be called upon to give the promised satisfaction, in the third, and was looking for Laurie, wishing to have him for his second.

He had paid little attention to Eugenie's words until struck by the tone of her last question.

Eugenie's reply to his inquiry came like a thunderbolt:

"The story goes that I have been made the subject of a drunken brawl, with the result that you are to fight a duel—thus increasing public interest in the disgraceful affair."

"Can you name one man who repeats that foul lie? I wish to get at the originator, that you may be satisfied it is untrue."

Decatur spoke quietly; Eugenie, still angry, was deceived, and quickly replied:

"There stands Don Antonio—ask him!"

Don Antonio was a Spanish nobleman, who had been last among those fighting for Eugenie's favor to surrender to Decatur.

The latter now unjustly suspected that the Spaniard had told the story to injure him, whereas Don Antonio had jestingly asked if Eugenie had heard that her many admirers were furious over the success of Decatur.

That was the whole story, but immediately after came the rumor of the duel, and, unfortunately, Eugenie connected Don Antonio with both.

Leaving Eugenie, Decatur, full of wrath, went straight to the unsuspecting Don, with whom he had but a slight acquaintance.

Full of extravagant and unmeaning politeness, the Don expressed great joy on beholding Decatur, ending with the usual wish:

"And may you live one thousand years!"

"You will live about one thousand minutes, unless you can explain what you have been telling Miss de Morny!" was the fierce, though apparently friendly and loud-spoken response.

"What do you mean, sir?" haughtily demanded the Don, adding:

"I've told Miss de Morny nothing but the truth."

"You lie!" hissed Decatur.

"Where and when you will," he continued; "you can have satisfaction for that, but endeavor not to talk of it!"

The speaker stalked out of the room as he uttered these almost whispered words, but many eyes had been upon him, and when the Don's hand fell upon his sword-hilt at Decatur's insulting words, every one knew what happened.

"Another duel!" laughingly exclaimed one of the English officers, who had consented to act as a second to three meetings next morning, adding:

"These Americans are fire-eaters!"

Eugenie heard the words, and an hour later Decatur received a letter from her.

CHAPTER XXI.

DESPERATE DUELING.

"—Front to front

Bring thou this fiend—

Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,
Heaven forgive him, too!"

MACHETH.

THE glances shot at him, as he crossed the Mackays' drawing-room, revealed to Decatur that the object, or subject, or both, of his conversation with Don Antonio, were no secret to many of the assemblage.

Cursing his hot-headedness, in thus giving ground for further gossip, Decatur left the house to seek Somers as a counselor, and Laurie as a second.

He wondered where the latter was, and learned only on informing Somers of what had occurred between Don Antonio and himself.

Guessing something of his friend's error, Somers said:

"You can't fight the Don to-morrow—that's certain."

"Now, promise me not to fight until I can have two minutes' conversation with him and your second, and I'll tell you where to find Laurie."

"Nothing derogatory in promising?" demanded Decatur.

"Nothing—positively."

"Then I promise."

"Very well. You'll find Laurie with Captain Dare. He returned to the ship this morning, and can be of no use to you until I am out of my scrape."

"But how am I to arrange with the Don?" half-angrily asked Decatur.

"Easily enough. I'll write to-night, saying he can send his man to me to-morrow."

"But before your letter can be delivered to-morrow—"

Decatur stopped short, somewhat confused, but Somers understood what he was about to say, and replied:

"Very true, Steve, but if I am dead, as you were about to remark, will not that be ample excuse for referring the Don's second to your friend Laurie?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Just as this reluctant reply was uttered, one of the inn servants tapped on the door.

"A letter for Lieutenant Decatur," he announced, handing the billet to Somers, who had answered his knock.

"The Don's in a hurry," remarked Decatur, as he took the letter, but a minute later turned pale—so pale that Somers forbore questioning when the missive was crushed into a ball and tossed into the fire.

The letter was from Eugenie, and read:

"I cannot consent—or appear to do so—to your efforts to make me the talk of the town, by challenging every gentleman who speaks of, or to, me, and must, therefore, ask to be released from our engagement."

It was a stinging letter, and, for several minutes, Decatur sat like one who had received a stunning blow.

"That was from Miss de Morny, and ends our engagement," he said, very quietly, as, after a few minutes, he arose and bade his friend good-night.

Somers shook his hand, in silent sympathy, and Decatur retired to his room.

It is five o'clock in the morning, in a field near the garrison barracks at Malta.

Four men are engaged in conversation, while four more—three together and one alone—stand apart from them.

The first four are Decatur and the English seconds, who have just arranged the order of firing, and only await the arrival of the two surgeons to begin.

In a few minutes, the surgeons appear on the scene, and Decatur immediately places his friend on the mark—with his back to the rising sun.

The English officer is already in position, the word given, and both men fire. Both stagger back, wounded, but neither falls, and a hasty examination reveals that each is only slightly wounded.

"Quick! Get your man in position!" exclaimed Decatur, as soon as the extent of Somers's injury had been ascertained.

Again Decatur had won the choice of position, and the second English officer stood with the sun in his eyes.

Again the stern, deadly preliminaries are gone through, but this time both men fall—and both are badly wounded.

"My friend is unable to stand—" begins Decatur.

"And, of course, this must end right here!" interrupts one surgeon.

"Oh, no! I promised these gentlemen that I would see the affair to the finish, and, if you will attend to my friend, I will fill his place with the third gentleman."

The first two officers had purposely claimed precedence, because the third was a noted duelist, an exceedingly bitter man, but he was not to be cheated out of his revenge, and although all protested against it, claimed his shot.

"I will wait, if necessary," said he, "until he can stand, and then I will kill him!"

"Not at all necessary," came the response from Somers. "Why not settle it now? I can sit up."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Decatur.

"No nonsense, Steve! I positively will give this gentleman his shot, and you must not interfere—except to help me."

"Stand with your leg to my back."

Remonstrance was useless. Somers firmly insisted on fighting to the bitter end, and the professional duelist took his position, while his crippled opponent leaned against Decatur's knee—the latter being half-kneeling.

Decatur was mad with rage, and as the other took his position, shouted:

"You cur! Unless your shot kills both, you shall meet me!"

(The picture is not at all overdrawn. Richard Somers fought the three duels, and the last one in precisely the position described.)

Nothing but Somers's demand for it could induce the English second to give the word.

"It's murder!" he protested.

"Never mind, give it!" ordered Somers.

It was given, and as the echoes died away, the professional duelist breathed his last, while Somers, with a low moan, sunk back in Decatur's arms.

"He was not hit this time," declared the surgeon. "It's the strain on his nerves and loss of blood."

"Happy to hear it!" simultaneously exclaimed both of Somers's late opponents, while their second joined in expressing relief that the gallant fellow had not received a third wound.

Decatur, of course, was more relieved than any one else, to hear the surgeon's declaration, and thanking the English officers for their kind expressions, had Somers removed to the nearest inn.

Before noon the true story of the three duels—that is, that Somers had insulted the English officers, and that Decatur had acted as his second—was pretty well known throughout the city.

Decatur was made aware of this through the arrival of Laurie at the inn about the same time that Somers became fully conscious—one o'clock in the afternoon.

"How did I find you?" echoed Laurie. "Why, if you had hired the town-crier, your whereabouts couldn't be better known."

"Send for Don Antonio!" whispered Somers.

"Now leave me with the surgeon," he continued, as Laurie started off, and, after some persuasion, Decatur consented to leave the room when the Don should be announced.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"Dear, if you knew what tears they shed,
Who live apart from home and friend,
To pass my house, by pity led,
Your steps would tend."

On arriving at Mr. Mackay's residence, Laurie found Don Antonio—as he had been assured by Decatur that there "the Spaniard surely would be."

The Don, however, was not in the happy frame of mind that his jealous, and more successful, rival supposed he was. On the contrary, he was vainly endeavoring to avoid saying anything regarding his impending duel with Decatur, while the whole Mackay family, backed by Eugenie, clamored for information.

Laurie knew nothing of what had taken place the previous evening, and, therefore, was not at all surprised at pale, anxious and tearful Eugenie's inquiry:

"Is Mr. Decatur safe?"

But he was surprised at the way the Don was attacked, when, after assuring Eugenie that Decatur was uninjured, Laurie continued:

"In fact I am a messenger from him—or

rather from Mr. Somers, (with whom he now is,) and turning to Don Antonio.

"Mr. Somers wishes to have you call on him. If you can accompany me, all the better."

This suggestion was met by a general protest, led by Eugenie's:

"Another duel! How could you come on such an errand, Mr. Lawrence?"

"Mr. Lawrence" looked bewildered; the Don was confused, and both silent, while she continued:

"Though misunderstanding what I meant, Mr. Decatur quarreled with Don Antonio last night—I am sure he did, and now—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Laurie. "If you'll allow Don Antonio to accompany me, I think I'm safe in guaranteeing that no harm will come of it."

"Somers can't stir, and I'll have nothing to do with any affair between Steve and any one else, until you hear from me."

"This, I feel certain, is a friendly meeting."

With this assurance, the Don was allowed to accompany Laurie to where Somers awaited him.

At the door, Eugenie had whispered:

"Tell him to come as soon as he can forget that cruel letter."

Laurie did not of course, understand the message, but learning that Decatur was in the adjoining room, left the Don, the surgeon and Somers, (all three talking at the same time,) endeavoring to get at the reason for the insult to Don Antonio.

"Well, you found him there?" asked Decatur, as Laurie entered the room.

The latter noted the bitter smile accompanying the assertive question, and connecting this with Eugenie's words, carelessly replied:

"Yes, poor fellow, he was there, and having a hard time of it."

"He hailed my arrival as a condemned murderer would a reprieve."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, when I appeared on the scene, I found the unfortunate Don surrounded by the whole Mackay family, and led on by that beautiful and usually angelic Miss de Morny, but—"

"Say, Steve! I'd rather face an angry tigress, than be the man who fought, or caused you to fight, a duel."

Decatur was now beginning to look somewhat interested, and slyly noting this fact, Laurie continued:

"Ye gods! How she did go for that poor Don Antonio!"

"She accused him of every crime in the calendar, but worst of all, (by not clearing himself of something, of which you demanded an explanation) of causing you to challenge him."

"How could he clear himself," excitedly demanded Decatur.

Laurie saw he was on the right track, and in the same carelessly-amused tone, answered:

"Oh, it seems you misunderstood something Miss de Morny said, but it appears the Don did not explain, as he might have done."

Just then the surgeon entered to say that Decatur was wanted by Somers.

"In a minute," said Laurie, and turning to Decatur:

"Did you get a letter from Miss—"

"Yes!" eagerly interrupted Decatur.

"Ah! That explains the message I received from Miss de Morny."

"As soon as you can forget—or forgive—I don't remember which—that cruel letter, you are to call on her."

"That's all—go ahead!"

With the last words, Laurie pushed his friend into the adjoining room—the occupants of which were astonished at the change in his countenance, which, when he left them, was gloomy, downcast, desperate, while, now, it was bright, cheerful and amiable in expression.

Without giving the others an opportunity to speak, Decatur offered his hand to the astonished Don, saying:

"I beg your pardon for my rudeness, and hope you will accept this apology until I can explain more fully."

"It is unnecessary," returned the Don, while Decatur, addressing Somers, continued:

"I must leave you, but Laurie will remain until I return."

"Important official business," remarked Laurie with a sarcastic smile.

Darting a warning, reproachful look at the speaker, Decatur hurried away—to Eugenie.

"Watch the change in him when he does return," continued Laurie.

"He's an amiable human being now, but then he'll be an angel."

It was a long wait, but when Decatur did re-

turn, his manner and appearance fully verified Laurie's prediction—he was angelic in amiability and Chesterfieldian in courtesy.

"It's all settled," declared Laurie, when his friend had occasion to leave them for a few minutes, and, while the others did not fully understand his meaning, they agreed that there was a great—a wonderful change in Decatur.

A week after the reconciliation between Eugenie and Decatur, the refitting of the ships being completed, they were ordered to sea.

Then there were—oh, such sad partings, secret meetings (which might as well have been public), whispered comfortings—and then two sad-faced young men sailed away from too equally sad-faced girls.

The latter, however, had the advantage of their lovers, in that they had the consolations of their friends and the distractions of society, while Decatur and Laurie had nothing but sarcastic remarks from their only confidant—Spence—and the wearisome, monotonous work of continuing the winter blockade of Tripoli to amuse them.

And so we must leave them for the present. Somers was compelled to remain in Malta because of his wounds, while Dare was overjoyed to be relieved for the winter, since he was thus enabled to accompany his wife home.

Madame Moreau and Victor, together with Eugenie, took advantage of the fact that the ship Dare sailed in touched at Havre, and accompanied him and his wife.

"Thus far our chronicle—and now we pause.
Though not for want of matter—but 'tis time."
BYRON.

THE END.

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